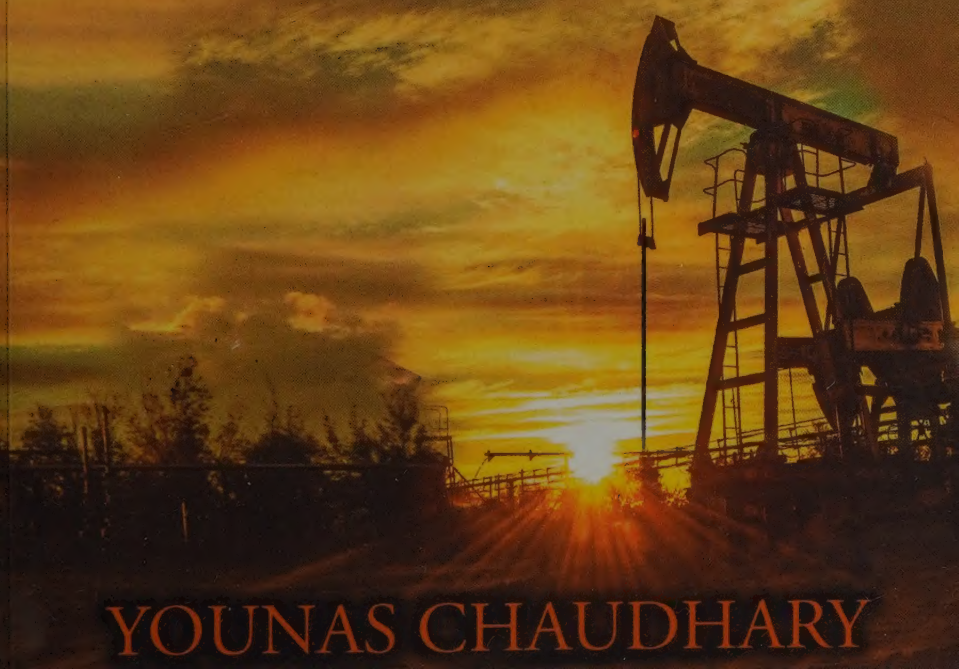
FROM DIRT ROADS TO BLACK GOLD

AN OILMAN FOLLOWS HIS DESTINY FROM A SMALL VILLAGE TO THE MANSIONS OF TEXAS



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From Dirt Roads to Black Gold

An Oilman Follows His Destiny from a Small Village to the Mansions of Texas

by Younas Chaudhary

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Foreword

A wise man once said, "You can't know where you are going unless you know where you came from."

This is my story.

No matter how successful I may have been in my life, I never forget that it all began halfway across the world, in a village so small, it did not even have a name, just a number: 99 6/R.

In some ways, while I was growing up there, I felt as if I had no name. I was just another poor Pakistani villager destined to travel on the muddy and dusty dirt roads for the rest of my life. But I had an inner drive, a strong family, a firm faith, a little bit of luck, and good timing. All those things helped me to escape 99 6/R village near Sahiwal, Pakistan, to end up in my own version of Paradise, better known to most as Houston, Texas, USA.

In the following pages, you will see that success did not come easy, and it did not come without a price. In 2012, my wife, Bushra, complained to me about an aching pain in her left shoulder. The complaints became more frequent and the pain spread from her shoulder to her neck and then to her back. Slowly, the pain meticulously spread across her

whole body. Prior to these pains, her health had been completely normal.

One day, she tripped and bruised herself during her daily walk at the park. When I asked her about the incident, she innocently responded, "I don't remember." This was the first time I realized that whatever was happening to her was starting to get serious. In addition to these unknown issues, it appeared as if she was showing some signs of dementia.

Bushra started to become a little forgetful and had difficulty with her hand-eye coordination. I took her to various doctors, but they all had differing opinions. One doctor said her spine was twisted, another suggested physical therapy, and yet another thought she had an anxiety syndrome. My family did not know what to think or believe. We just watched as the health of our beloved mother and wife slowly deteriorated in front of our eyes.

On June 10, 2014, Bushra was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease.

It was a shock.

I wept quietly for days. My wife had been my buffer. She had raised our four wonderful children and helped them raise our seven grandchildren. She was now losing her health and memory in front of our eyes. Today, I look after Bushra's day-to-day caregiving needs. She is here at home where she

mostly stays in her own world. She enjoys her children visiting her, but there are hardly any productive conversations due to her memory.

This has been devastating.

The reason you are holding this book in your hand is due to Bushra and our battle with Parkinson's and dementia. In 2014, I started thinking about writing a book. I knew I had to write some of the main events down, so we could remember both the good and the bad times of our life. Her illness has left me with plenty of free and lonely time.

From our humble beginnings in Pakistan, Bushra and I built a successful life together. I was able to start and grow a thriving business; we have four healthy, wonderful children and seven beautiful grandchildren. We have a legacy.

I wanted all our family to know more about our lives. I wanted my children to know that success does not come easy. Sometimes, it means taking on menial work. In my case, it meant selling pots and pans door-to-door, driving a taxi, cutting meat in a slaughterhouse, and at least in one case, trying to convince a group of Hispanic workers that I was not Hispanic (more on that later).

By writing this book, I want to communicate the crucial events of my life, so you can benefit from those experiences.

There was another reason as well, perhaps one that people might call selfish: I did not want my memories to slip away from me.

In this book, you will read about our journey that began from dirt roads in a small village in Pakistan to the oil fields of Texas. On the surface, it might seem like the usual struggles for a first-generation immigrant in a new land, or even an oilman's success story. But I try to go deeper into the sobering aspects of women being denied their basic human rights in Pakistan and to explore and reveal unjust religious persecutions in the country where I was born.

I get asked all the time about how I got into the oil and gas business and how I became successful. I do not have any secrets to my success, except that I have always tried to be a consistent, dedicated, and positive hard worker who does not let obstacles get in my way.

Writing this book was not easy. It opened up some painful memories and a few chuckles along the way. I can tell you with certainty, however, that I have opened my heart while writing this book. Certain names have been changed so as not to offend anyone who may have touched my life. To anyone I have mentioned in this book or didn't mention, you have touched my life and heart in one way or another, which has led me to be the person I am today, and to you, I say,

"Many thanks with lots of love and humility." To anyone present or not present in this book, I offer my sincerest apologies in advance and a request for forgiveness if I hurt your feelings, as that is not my intention.

Chapter 1

Humble Beginnings

I was born in the summer of 1952 into a traditional Pakistani family in a small sun-parched village called 99 6/R near Sahiwal (also known as Montgomery), a city in southern Punjab. This small village is located just 15 miles west of Harappa, an ancient city that dates back to 6,000 BC and was part of the Indus Valley civilization. Historians say it was a major urban center in the Bronze Age that had a diversified economy and a sophisticated writing system. In contrast, my sleepy village in the 1950s and 1960s was a very remote place by any stretch of the imagination.

My village had no electricity, running water, sewer system or paved roads until the late 1960s. It was located close to a large canal, a major railroad track and a main black-top road that connected us to the main thoroughfare.

Most of the people in my village were poor, and almost all of them were illiterate. Villagers had no interest in sending their children to school. If you were a female, the thought of going to school was inconceivable in the villages.

We had scorching summers, and it was not uncommon to see the temperature rise to 113 degrees

Fahrenheit or beyond. On hot days, the villagers huddled near a man-made creek and kept cool by pouring dirty, muddy water on their bodies. Men wore chador, a loose-fitting cotton sheet that protected them below the waist from the sun's rays. Most male villagers did not wear shirts.

It's hard to believe that only 60 years ago, most of the rural villages in Pakistan had none of the conveniences we take for granted today.

For example, when nature called, villagers would dig a hole in which to relieve themselves, or they would simply sit on the ground to relieve themselves. After they were done, they would cover their waste with dirt or ashes from the burnt firewood.

Most of the cooking was done over a fire lit by a mixture of dried buffalo excrement mixed with wheat chaff. The mixture created a substance that would burn for hours, without any unusual smell. This was the firewood we used to either keep warm or to cook.

There was a fresh water well in the middle of our compound, and we would haul the water ourselves from the well and store it in clay-built tanks or concrete tanks. The tanks were plastered on the outside with a mix of sand and water, and inside, it was cement. We drank water from the well using pouches made from cowhide, which were attached

to a rope and lowered into the well to gather what was needed for drinking or cooking. We used the water to bathe in as well. We never thought about any parasites that may be polluting the water, but I assume our bodies had built up a natural immunity to them. In addition to the tank that we used, there was also a lower tank the animals used to drink water from.

During the summers, water from the well was especially nice and refreshing. Throughout the hot summers, villagers used small, handcrafted fans made of dried bamboo leaves to get respite from the heat. The fan had a short handle and a notch, and it was very popular during the heat. The more affluent villagers had bigger handmade fans; generally, a servant kept them cool by fanning it as they lay there lazily. Of course, being a child, I was not lucky enough to have anyone fan me.

One of my daily chores was to "go out and milk the buffalo." This was quite the task, especially on a hot summer day. Occasionally, I would get halfway through milking, and my hands would begin to cramp. I would stop to rest, and get a stare from the buffalo, as if the buffalo were to say, "Hey, you started this; you need to finish." Or else, she would simply start walking away, probably thinking to herself, "You may have all the time in the world, but I don't."

During the summer (and really, during most times of the year), when we wanted vegetables, we did not go to a local supermarket; we went into the field to pick cauliflower, beans, or whatever vegetable happened to be in season. Typically, family dinners were spur-of-the-moment decisions. Around 2 o'clock, my father would decide what dinner was to be, and he would say to one of the children something like, "Do you see that chicken in the middle there? He's going to be dinner tonight. Now, go catch him."

I think perhaps the chickens could sense the danger, as they would immediately begin to run. Catching a running chicken is not easy; they are very fast. Nevertheless, off we would go, attempting to catch our dinner. Oftentimes, we were successful. The best way to accomplish this task was to chase it around the compound until it got tired. It was a much easier catch when the chicken was worn out. If the children wore out before the chicken, one of the servants would continue until dinner was caught. In any case, by five o'clock, dinner was served.

We did the same thing with goats and mutton, even though preparing them took a bit longer. Since we had no way of preserving the meat, everyone got their share of food. In the case of a buffalo, when we slaughtered one, the whole

village ate, even the dogs, who were the recipients of the large buffalo bones.

Everyone went to sleep completely full.

When discussing the social behaviors surrounding food and preparing meals, I can't help but think about how, at the time in Pakistan, beef was considered "poor people's meat," and if you were seen shopping for beef, your neighbors would wonder to themselves what streak of bad luck had befallen your family. In a world away, when I go to a butcher shop today and order 90-day dry-aged prime filet mignon, no one would think I'm poor. Life is ironic in that way.

Winters in Sahiwal came with spells of intense, dry, and bone-chilling cold that would make your soul shiver. The older villagers would sit on the banks of a canal in the village, enjoying the warmth of the sun's rays to thaw out the chill. Most times, they would reserve their spots in the early mornings, as they craved the sun's heat. They would eat breakfast, smoke hookah, gossip, and praise the sun for the warmth it brought to their lives.

The lack of electricity meant a virtual absence of any form of entertainment except for a battery-powered radio. At nighttime, the villagers lit up their lanterns with kerosene oil and used them in various parts of their home, including for reading and studying.

My grandfather, Chaudhary Mohammed Ismael, established our village in 1947 after moving into the area following retirement from the Indian Royal British Military. He had a large family of five sons and four daughters living under the same roof until the daughters moved out after their marriages. His sons continued to live together in the same home with their wives and children throughout their lives.

I grew up in a traditional family with several uncles, aunts, cousins, and a multitude of relatives all living in one large house called a haveli [compound]. A colorful mud wall, around ten feet high with paintings, surrounded our home. These outer walls were beautifully designed with embedded broken glass on top of the mud wall to protect us from thieves entering the main house at night, something that was common in villages. During the summer, flocks of birds and pigeons found shelter inside the house, with many building their own nests.

My grandfather was a farmer and owned land around the village that he built; this is where he settled after his service to the Indian army. He owned horses, steer, buffalo, cows, sheep, dogs and goats. During the daytime, the animals were taken outside the haveli into the farmland to graze and run around. At night, they were brought back to rest inside the haveli.

I spent most of my childhood time in the inner haveli where we had a separate area inside the main house for our family. During my childhood years in the village, everyone, including my family, lived close to the animals. The omnipresent smell of the animals did not make us uncomfortable as we understood that they helped us in our livelihood.

The women sought the help of servants called jarough, who regularly swept the floors of our house and filled water in big clay jars. In addition to performing a variety of chores, they also did the cooking, pounded the grain, and sliced the vegetables for each meal.

I was born at home, contrary to the Western culture of being born in a hospital. I spent my early childhood in the village. I was a timid, shy, and introverted child, who did not like the busy life in the village. Most of the boys in my village were aggressive, vulgar, and violent in comparison. They often got into fistfights, and I wondered why they were fighting against one another for such little things. The adults were even worse; they talked loudly, fought, and cursed like drunken sailors. To me, during my early years, village life was chaotic. It was not enjoyable, friendly, loving, or peaceful. Now, some 60 years later, as I look back on the experience, I still have unpleasant memories of the time I spent in the

village, However, I am grateful for the childhood experiences that I encountered, which helped shape who I am today.

We came to live in a small village near Sahiwal city because of my grandfather, one of the original settlers. He came from Khoot-Khora in the Sialkot area in Pakistan and worked many years for the Royal British Military in India. The British gifted him large tracts of land near the city of Montgomery (Sahiwal) in 1947 for his loyal services, and he became the numberdar [village chief] and owned most of the land around the three sides bordering our village 99-6/R.

My grandfather had five sons and four daughters, the eldest being my father, Mohammed Ishaque Chaudhary. The tradition at that time dictated that the elder male son received special treatment from the entire family. In 1957, my grandfather passed away in his mid-80s after a pulmonary illness. This changed the course of our lives forever.

My father, who had been stationed in the Pakistan Air Force in Sargodha, decided to take early retirement and move to the village to become the village chief. Being the eldest son, this was not only his honor but also his obligation to uphold the legacy of the family. He had to look after all his younger brothers, especially the two younger brothers who were still young and single. Because of this cultural tradition, in 1957,

we had to move from Sargodha to the village near Montgomery (Sahiwal) to live with all our extended family.

I recall very little about the 1957 move, other than the fact that we moved to the village in an open-bed truck.

The villagers had great respect for my father. When he sat on a chair at his regular meeting to hear their daily issues and complaints, they would sit on the floor across from him with their legs crossed, and they spoke in hushed tones out of fear and respect. My father was not an intimidating man, but he garnered respect through his actions.

I was five years old in 1957 when I started attending a lower-class elementary village school that was located next to our village. I had to walk approximately a mile each way to school. As a young boy who came from a city where every morning my mother would lovingly make breakfast and give me a mid-day snack, this new life was entirely different, and I perceived it to be a negative change. Breakfast was roti, a version of buttery, handmade wheat flatbread. I ate it with sugar, local homemade honey, and achar [pickle], and every day, I would walk to my school. I hated all of it, but I could not complain to anyone because I was just a child. At least during the weekends, there was some reprieve to this new schedule, and we were able to eat meat, as our diet was mostly vegetarian during the week.

Later, my father enrolled me in a village middle school a bit further away—almost two miles. I had a basta [backpack], a simple, strap-on cloth bag that I would put over my shoulders. Inside, I would carry a notebook, a few pencils, and my lunch box. My school uniform was a traditional, ash-colored shalwar kameez during the summer, but in winter, we wore warm clothes.

I had to walk through narrow uninhabited farm dirt roads, and I was taught early on not to talk to strangers. My greatest fear was that someone would try to kidnap me and make me work in far-off lands. During those days, people spread rumors suggesting that certain tribes would kidnap young children, harm them, cut or damage their hands and legs, make them blind or force them to work as beggars or in other slave-labor jobs.

My morning walk on dusty dirt roads to my school took 45 minutes to over an hour. Once I arrived, a loud bell would herald the time for our morning school assembly. We sang the Pakistani national anthem every day at the all-boy's school where everything was taught in Urdu, the national language. Each class had around 40 or 50 students. We sat on floor mats throughout the day, and during our one-hour customary lunch break, we used to chitchat and play. My favorite class was the physical training class called PT.

During those days, we all had a universal dislike for Englishmen, and almost all students spoke Punjabi, another entirely different language from Urdu. The anti-British sentiment was very much alive, and those who spoke English were called firangis [foreigners]. At school, our studies focused more on Islamic teachings, and there was a plethora of things to memorize.

Middle school became traumatic for me, as I was constantly bullied. One reason for the bullying was because I came to school well-dressed and wore proper shoes in comparison to other school children who were either barefoot or wore cheap slippers and sandals. Most of them came from impoverished and illiterate families. They would gang up on me and call me sheri babu, meaning a city boy. My mother had lived in various larger cities during my father's work in the Air Force, and she raised me to act like we were still living in the city, even though we were then living in a remote village with no basic facilities.

This was unfortunate for me, but my mother was oblivious to village customs or schoolyard bullying, and my father did not interact with me much, as was common in those days. My mother had made it mandatory that all her children learn Urdu and speak it both at home and outside. I was mocked and bullied at school for speaking in Urdu, as all my

classmates spoke only Punjabi, and they felt that I belonged to a higher social order and that I was showing off.

Shafique was the biggest bully in my school. He had a slim build and came from a different village and used to stalk and push me, and he often frightened me. He told scary stories and mentally tormented and threatened me all the time. I soon hated getting up in the morning and going to school, but I had no choice and no other options. No one listened to me or to any of my pleas and complaints.

One day, I had to ask Shafique directions to go to a place near the school, and he purposely gave me the wrong directions. I got terribly lost on the dirt roads. That was one of the scariest days of my life and a day that still haunts me.

Shafique would encourage other students in the class to bully me, and together, they would poke me from different sides with sharp-edged pens or pencils.

"Who is poking me with a pencil?" I would ask.

Hiding behind me, Shafique and his gang would say, "None of us, sheri babu," and then, someone would poke me from behind, and they would all start laughing. Sometimes, they would hide my lunch box and inappropriately touch me and tease me when adults were not around. The bullying was at such a young and impressionable age that it left deep scars in my mind as I grew up. To this day, I am still afraid of being

alone at nighttime. As detrimental as this experience was, it also had its upside. The bullying made me resilient. As time wore on, I was able to recall my strength in the face of adversity, and I was able to emerge stronger in many tough situations in later parts of my life.

At home, no one seemed interested in listening to me talk about my miserable existence at school. On the contrary, my older brother Aziz was studying in an elite boarding school in Sargodha, a city where my father was earlier stationed. He came home to the village only for short stays during his school breaks. One day, I got the courage and told my father about being bullied at school.

"Just ignore it. These are all silly, common things that happen at school, so don't make a big deal out of it," he said.

I knew that telling my mother wouldn't yield anything, as she had never gone to school, and her position as a female at this time in Pakistan would not lead to any change in my situation.

As the days passed, life at school became even more miserable. I finally complained to a teacher, as one of the bullies started pushing me around hard, and it started hurting. The teacher ignored my complaint and said the school's definition of bullying meant you had been beaten up badly,

such as having your teeth broken or showing some signs of a bloody fight.

Life at this village school presented me more embarrassments, and I was humiliated and isolated.

As a child, I was not particularly fond of breakfast. One day, after multiple attempts to make me eat, my mother complained to my father that I was not listening to her. My father found a very ingenious way to punish me.

It was around 8 o'clock in the morning, and I was walking with my friends to school. Soon, I saw my father cycling towards me. This was unusual since I had not seen him go on his bike at such an early hour. He came near me and very loudly admonished me in front of my friends for not eating breakfast. He yelled at me to turn around and go home and eat breakfast first before going to school.

He punished me by making me run on the dusty dirt road in front of his bike all the way back home. This happened as most of my schoolmates were walking towards the school.

Here I was, running in the opposite direction in front of my father's bike instead of walking to school. My friends had already started laughing at me, and I was quite embarrassed.

I knew my father loved me, but he was not the type who would show any expression of love or friendliness during

my youth or adult life. Perhaps this was due to the culture at that time in Pakistan.

There were no hugs or affectionate gestures shown by a typical father. He was present, but he was not emotionally involved in my life. This was the first big public embarrassment I faced in my early childhood life, and it is one that is engrained in my memory.

I became aware that in Pakistan, it was common for people to humiliate others publicly and not care about long-term repercussions. My father used to beat servants for simple mistakes, and they had no recourse. I felt humiliated and thoroughly embarrassed after that incident. I asked my father about it years later; he said that was the way of life in Pakistan. He was just following our culture and traditions.

I did not understand it then, and I still do not understand it now. I was closer to my mother, as she would sometimes serve as the intermediary if I needed something from my father.

My mother was affectionate and more emotionally available for her children. She did not have any formal education, and I think she was interested in getting me educated as I grew up, although she had no idea how to do so, nor did she have any control over it since it was decided by men.

My father was mainly interested in a proper education for my elder brother, and he had little interest in getting me into good schools. Looking back, I felt this was odd, but that was the prevailing culture of village life in Pakistan during those days. Moreover, my mother was overprotective of my brother Aziz when he was around, much more than me. It was only when Aziz left for Sargodha that she would be protective of me, and if somebody talked ill of us, she would confront them directly. Overall, my mother acted as more of a maid or servant to my father at home, as this was part of the culture at that time.

I have very few memories as a child of our city life in Sargodha, or of why we left city life and moved and settled in the small village with only dusty dirt roads near Sahiwal. We had lived in a civilized environment in Sargodha, and coming to the village was a shock for all of us, except for my father. Here, children ran naked, villagers wore fewer clothes, and fistfights were common. From the pictures I have seen of my parents' early married life, they seemed to be very outgoing and fun, but there were obvious radical changes from what I saw in their village life.

Our small village residents were mostly from the Arain tribe, an agricultural caste who settled mainly in Punjab. The people were traditionally involved in farming and were

small landowners or small businessmen. The other castes that lived around us included Malik, Mirza, Jatts, Sheikh, and Chaudharys, and each caste was known for a specialized skill, trade or way of life.

The Arains were a smart and clever tribe. I learned later in life that some members of the village's Arain tribe had conspired against my father's siblings to make my father resign from his good city job in the Air Force and return to the remote village life as a chief. This event changed our entire existence as a family, yet I was unaware until I was older of the details surrounding this shift.

Once my father got settled as village chief, he purchased a tractor to farm the land; this was a big deal in the mid-sixties. He also started using fertilizer to grow crops faster, and this was considered new at the time.

As time passed, he arranged for the marriage of his two younger brothers, my two uncles. Dawood was married to a beautiful woman. My aunt Dilshad came from an educated family. This decision proved to be a poor one, and it eventually came back to haunt my father and my family. I was surprised how Dawood, with no education and a vulgar personality, could marry such a beautiful and educated girl. Her family was from a city; they were open-minded and educated, quite contrary to my uncle.

My father also arranged the marriage of his youngest brother, Ijaz (Yahya), to an Arain woman, Aunt Shamaim. Yahya's wife was a sharp-tongued lady from a village family who created divisions within the family very quickly after their marriage.

My father also had another younger brother, Uncle Idris. He was very close to my father and he was quite a funny and kind-hearted brother to my father. Uncle Idris often imitated other villagers and close relatives quite well. My father enjoyed and loved his company and humor.

As my father tried to get his brothers settled in life, the Arains slowly began to create divisions in our family. They told my three younger uncles, Dawood, Yahya, and Idris, that they should ask for independent ownership of their individual pieces of land and have my father relinquish control to them. They were advised that this would make them more money.

They disliked the fact that my father had purchased a tractor to cultivate all their lands, so they encouraged my uncle Dawood to dump sugar inside the tractor's gasoline tank. They told him this would harm the engine, and it would be ruined. According to stories from the villagers, Dawood tried, but it did not work.

The Arains proved successful at filling my uncles' minds with fear, greed, and jealousy as they conspired to break up our family. Together, they began to spread rumors that my father was full of greed with a lust for power, and that he was someone who would not relinquish control over the land to the detriment of his family. While these rumors were far from true, they subtly planted the seed for major shifts in my family's life.

One morning, amid the Eid celebration, a festivity held signifying the end of Ramadan, the whole family had assembled inside our local village mosque to pray and to welcome the festive season. The entire family was neatly dressed in our traditional Eid clothes for the big occasion that typically began with Eid prayers. My father, being the eldest, led the prayers and sermon in an area inside the mosque called the Mihrab (a pious place in the mosque facing the Kaaba in Mecca, the direction all Muslims face when praying).

Everyone gathered around, waiting for the prayer to begin, and my uncle, Issah, said to my father, "Phajee [big brother], please go lead the prayer." My father got up to walk to the Mihrab to start the sermon. Suddenly, Uncle Idris started to walk toward the Mihrab to lead the Eid prayer too.

The three younger brothers banded together and demanded they lead the Eid prayer. My father was deeply

insulted, as his role as the patriarch of the family was being questioned. Within seconds, a big scuffle began, and this led to a bloody fistfight between brothers. The fight started off in the Mihrab area, the holiest place inside the mosque, and it later spread to other areas inside and outside the mosque. My father and Uncle Issah were on one side fighting against the three younger brothers. My uncles took sides and started hitting each other with their bare arms and kicking one another.

The violent, vicious fight lasted for several minutes, and it ended when all five brothers were panting and exhausted. In the middle of the fight, my father's dhoti (loose piece of clothing wrapped around the lower half of the body) was about to come off, and this signaled a halt to the fighting. Aziz and I stood bewildered, as we were both onlookers and did not participate in the fight.

Fighting was not uncommon, but this was the holiest of days for Muslims, and on top of that, the mosque is the House of God, and fighting in the mosque is nothing short of sacrilege. The mosque in Islam is considered a very holy place and to think this fight broke out in this place of worship was a horrendous occurrence.

The Arains had succeeded in dividing our family, a strategy of "divide and conquer" the British had used for centuries to conquer and rule that part of the world.

The brothers were no longer friendly, and all suffered injuries, with Uncle Yahya leaving with a swollen face and a bloody nose. When the fight began, the women were initially onlookers, but Uncle Issah's wife, a strong village lady with a body builder's physique, fought against my three uncles. She came from a farming family and was well-trained in the art of street fighting.

The lust for power, ego, and wealth had led to this whole fight. The most devastating part was that it happened in a sacred and holy place of worship. As a young boy, I could not make sense of why my family was fighting in a pious place. The mosque was a place of sanctuary, where even the police could not enter or arrest someone who had taken refuge after committing a crime. Looking back, it taught me a valuable lesson about greed, jealousy, power, and how easily humans can be negatively influenced. In this case, the Arains successfully morphed my uncles' thinking, causing a great chasm in my family.

Little did I know at the time that those few violent minutes would change my own family's future for the good forever. It is so interesting to look back on the events that changed the trajectory of my life. At the time, no one could imagine how each event led to the next, charting a new course and dimensions for my future life and the lives of my family.

One of the most powerful influential individuals in my family at the time was Baygi [my grandmother], who sided with my three uncles after the fight and began to start openly insulting my father. Of course, she already had a reputation of being a terror in the village. When she walked the streets of the village, people would hide in fear as they were afraid of her wrath.

After the fight, Baygi appeared in front of our home, stood outside in front of our main entry door and started cursing my father using his nickname Saku, a shorter version of Ishaque.

"Saku, you have nothing; get lost from here. You will die, you will go to hell, you will leave empty-handed, and you are done!" Baygi would hurl abuses from the dirt road just off the main street accusing my father of aggression and of instigating the fight. Those days, Baygi disliked my father but deeply loved Yahya, her youngest beloved son.

Baygi was a strong, independent woman, and while she may have been a bit of a terror with a hot temper, she lived to be 105. In her last fifteen years of life, ironically, it was only my father who took on the role of caregiver, keeping her comfortable and looking after her in his home. My father would say nothing against her, even when she would hurl slurs against him. This was one of the greatest lessons that I learned

from my father: to do the right thing, even when the right thing is difficult.

It was apparent that Baygi's constant street taunting and anger in response to the family feud deeply hurt my father. In 1962, with little cash in his hand, my father decided to move all of us out of the village to Sahiwal city in a subdivision called Farid Town. By this time, I was ten years old, and Farid Town was around five miles from the village. We rented a modest house from a tailor for 40 rupees (less than $1 USD) a month, and I lived in that same rented home until I was 21, when I left Pakistan for Canada in 1973.

The move to Farid Town changed our destinies and paved the way for our family's future successes. Had that fight on Eid day not occurred, I would most likely still be wandering on the dirt roads and living in a village, farming my grandfather's piece of land, milking buffalo and chasing chickens. I would not have crossed the ocean for a new and better life in Canada and then America. Often, moments in our lives that seem the most distressing or chaotic are the exact moments that shape our lives and destinies for a happy and better future. The lesson I learned in life from such events was to find peace, positivity and gratitude, even in times of stress, as we really do not know what the future holds. I believe in God's will and that He knows what's best for us.

It is far more beneficial for us to trust in God and continue with optimism than to try and control things that are out of our hands.

My grandfather loved his land, and so did my father and mother. It was not just land for them; their honor, pride, legacy and status all were interrelated to the land. Selling any piece of that land would mean bringing dishonor to the family and future generations. So, my father lived all his life land-rich but cash-poor, yet he never thought of selling the land. Unfortunately, all my father's valuable millions of rupees' worth of land was stolen and snatched away from us. After he passed away, my father's own brother, Ijaz (Yahya) bribed local officials, used influence at corrupt local courts, presented false testimony, conducted perjury and forged signatures on land transfer documents and stole my father's land. We never went back to reclaim my father's land to avoid prolonged court fights and displeasures within the extended family, even though it was all pre-planned, stolen, snatched and taken away illegally by our own Uncle Yahya and partially by Uncle Dawood.

At the time of writing this book, I've found out that Uncle Yahya and his sons conspired to take over part of the same land from Uncle Dawood after Dawood passed away in 2016. That part of our land was also taken away from us by

Uncle Dawood after my father passed away. It's a good example of what goes around comes around, and what you sow, so shall you reap.

At the end of the day, I believe whatever illegal and wrong was done to us by our extended family members was because of their own reasons. I do not have any ill will towards any of them. I wish to extend my blessings and prayers for all my extended family. I have nothing against any of my relatives, my uncles, their children and all their extended families. I wish to seek my rights and good will from the higher power.

Chapter 2

A Little Boy Grows Up

While it was not as glamorous as moving from a small town in Texas to New York, the departure from my village's dirt roads into the paved roads of Farid Town, Sahiwal, in the mind of a young boy, was just as exciting.

I loved living in Farid Town, as it was a small town with plenty of activities. Even though they were covered with potholes, the roads were paved, and it was a welcome change from the muddy, dusty pathways of the village.

The market was just a five-minute walk from my home, and there were several stores. The largest was a general merchant store that sold everything you could imagine under one roof. The market square had several meat stores, barbershops, bicycle shops, sweet shops, and cantinas. There were three doctors' offices, and the town was flooded with bicycle repair shops, as bicycles were the primary mode of transportation in those days. To me, it was Nirvana.

Compared to the small, rural village from which I had come, the townsfolk were charming and gentle, and most seemed well-intentioned. The streets were peaceful, and

we used to watch lots of movies, as there were several nice cinemas.

We had friendly neighbors, and my mother used to walk daily with her friends after sunset. In the 1960s and 1970s in Pakistan, people felt safe. In the evenings, as young teenagers, we spent time roaming around the neatly manicured parks close to the canal. The smell of *malli* [jasmine] flowers permeated the campus of the Sahiwal Government College, a major landmark near Farid Town.

I used to play *gulli danda*, a game using two sticks, and I used to fly kites a lot. I could not play cricket, as we could not afford the high-priced bats and other accessories. As a result, I resorted to playing soccer and field hockey, as these were the more affordable sports to play.

We ate mostly at home, but when we went out, we purchased food from street vendors. They sold chicken tikka, a popular chicken curry dish noted for its spicy taste. In the evening, we could go to a street vendor, select a chicken of our liking and they would cut it in a halal manner and make the dish right in front of us. The wood-fired dish with onions, tomatoes, chili, and other spices was a big hit, and people enjoyed it quite a bit. Most vendors had a large-size tandoor oven that churned out fresh, buttery naan. Most people drank 7-Up or Coke, as

they felt it was the best accompaniment to have a cool drink with the spice of the foods.

After a heavy meal, many older adults smoked hookah. My father did not have one, as he despised smoking, and I did not pick up that habit either. However, my grandmother had an ornate hookah, and she would often smoke it all day long, especially after breakfast, lunch, and dinner. She had a person assigned to get the hookah prepared for her, and she rarely shared it with others. In those days, men and women did not smoke hookahs together; it was one of many activities that were gender separate.

Despite the ongoing political upheavals, Pakistan as a country was slowly making progress. Black-and-white television appeared in the late 60s and early 70s, and there were short television programs in the evenings from 7 to 10. We did not have a television at home but instead relied on a national radio that one of my uncles (my mother's youngest brother) had brought for us from England.

As we got settled in Farid Town Sahiwal in 1962, my father enrolled me in the local high school, Nangal Ambia High School. This was yet another poorly managed, low-performing local private school. Here, the bullying continued, but the biggest bullies were my teachers and not

my classmates. If you came slightly late to class, or if the teacher simply had a bad day, the teacher would ask you to stretch out your hand and they would give you lashings with a bamboo cane. The canes were made of freshly dried bamboo or from a local tree branch, and this was a common practice, especially in poor, low-performing schools for teachers to frighten, demoralize, and terrorize young students.

Teachers had two or three canes in their possession. During weekends, it seemed that some of them took great pleasure in making new ones so they could beat up young students once school reopened. Every painful beating had a particular method and rhythm. If you were accused of a mistake, you had to first stand at attention. The teacher would then ask you to straighten your palm to make sure the stick hit all five fingers with adequate force. Standing a couple of feet away, the teacher would start counting. "One, two, three..." There was no minimum punishment, but towards the end, the teacher would often make the lashings so hard, students would begin bursting in tears. There were no laws to stop such ongoing school punishments by the unkind teachers, and it successfully instilled fear in most of the young students, especially in the poorly run schools at the time.

I grew up surrounded by this relentless torture from teachers who thought physical pain would prevent young students from making mistakes later in life. Often, students would be left crying in agony, showing off their swollen, raw palms or other areas of the body that got hurt. They would sit in a corner of the class wailing for some time to recover, and if your wails became too loud, you would receive even more punishment. I personally received a few of those lashings from my school headmaster, Mushtaq, a terror of his own kind in those days, but I do not recall many beatings from my class teachers.

I grew up unhappy and deeply discouraged with my education from early grade school through to high school. I was angry at my father for sending me to such low-performing and poorly managed schools. First, the village school, and later to a high school located next to the government college near Farid Town.

At the same time, my brother Aziz was studying in an elite Pakistani Air Force school. I am sure Aziz had quite the opposite educational experience. As I mentioned earlier, it was common in the Pakistani culture for most parents to provide their eldest sons with a better education and the highest opportunities for future successes in life compared to any of their other younger siblings. If you

were born a girl, your role in society at that time was to bear children, cook, serve, and be a good homemaker; most girls living in villages were not even permitted to attend school or hold a professional job. Because of those old traditions, I felt that my father did not care much about my schooling, favoring my oldest brother, Aziz, instead. In those days, my mother did not have much of a voice in the family. As a result, I grew up without having anyone to speak to regarding my daily life issues, experiences, and difficulties of abuse at school.

I felt that due to my sub-par educational foundation, I was a poor student academically, as I lacked the basic learning skills needed to achieve higher grades.

As an example, my eighth-grade chemistry teacher attempted to seal my fate in middle school. He told me straight to my face, "You have no future, and you will become nobody." He compared my poor grades to that of the best student, the class monitor who usually received 90% in most subjects. While I was hurt by such remarks, I took most of them in stride, as I had convinced myself that academic accomplishments alone did not determine a person's future.

He did say one thing that helped me to see a light in what seemed like a sea of darkness. He told me that I had

good common sense, and for that, I may find some success at odd jobs. I had begun to believe the idea that one's zeal for success, consistency, hard work, and the ability to take risks was important. As it turned out, I was correct, even though this did not manifest until later in my life. To this day, the one piece of advice I give to all my new employees, co-workers, and family members is to always use common sense and drive to succeed.

Meanwhile, in high school, my father arranged a private tutor to teach me math and chemistry. Truth be told, I disliked going there. I would occasionally skip classes and instead go watch movies at the local cinema. One day, I came home, and my father asked me how my class went. I nodded saying it was good. I had actually gone to watch a movie with one of my cousins who was visiting us from out of town. My father knew that I did not go to the tutor as he had just gone to the tutor's house to check on me.

He gave me a good beating that day. It was one of the only major physical punishments he ever gave me.

As time passed, my father became more withdrawn. He was unhappy and discouraged that we were not living the lifestyle he desired. Our land alone was not bringing in enough cash to run our household. My father was caught up in external events, thus keeping him away from actively

generating a greater monetary return from the land that he owned. Rather than focusing on the financial affairs of his own household, he was busy settling other peoples' disputes and making promises to people to send them to Canada where Aziz was now living.

While my father became more and more disinterested in family matters, I developed new interests of my own in my teenage years.

During my teenage years, I liked talking to my neighbor's daughter, Mouna, in Farid Town. I was in the ninth grade. She was two years younger than me and a classmate of my younger sister Seema. Mouna was a good friend. She was my sister's close friend and used to come to our home regularly.

Even though I was not the most creative young boy, I helped with her homework, and I wrote riddles and poems, which I made up.

I was fond of my aunt's daughter, Aana, who visited Sangla Hill, a town 140 miles south of Islamabad where we went to my grandparent's house for summer vacations. Our friendship lasted for two summers. During the first summer, Aana and I got to know each other during daily family gatherings and evening walks with the family, and by the second summer, we were friends.

During the second summer, Aana fell off an inner tube into a canal and almost drowned. The canal was deep with fast running water, and she did not know how to swim, but I saw her falling, and I quickly dove in and scooped her up. She held onto me in fear of drowning in the deep water as we waded out of the canal. My quick reaction and the intensity of the rescue drew us to be good friends. Aana was a bubbly, happy and nice person.

During my school years, once I gave a self-help quote to a friend when that friend was struggling with a problematic piece of homework. It said, "Everything is possible to accomplish, but it requires constant efforts." I'm pretty sure I lifted it from somewhere, but my friend thought it was my original work.

My friend could not believe I wrote such a meaningful quote. Neither could I.

It is important to note that this simple but precious quote has stayed with me throughout my life, and I've applied it throughout my career and business dealings.

My brother, Aziz, and I hardly spent any time together in my early years. I spent a lot of time together with my two sisters: my younger sister, Seema, and my elder sister, Nisha. In fact, after Nisha got married and later settled down in Canada, I was close with Seema. Both

were very nice, loving, good listeners, caring, smart and kind-hearted sisters, and we all got along great through the years. I spent way more time with Seema, who is kind and soft-hearted. She has become more religious and her habits resemble that of my mother, so I jokingly call her Seema *Amijan* (mother).

I passed high school in second division (B grade), and this came as a shock to my teacher and to my father. Shortly thereafter, I joined the Sahiwal Government College. This was a liberating experience. There were no longer any abusive teachers, and in fact, the teachers at the college were more like friends.

The boys-only classes averaged in size between 20 and 40 students. I developed new friends, and we regularly went to watch movies and spent a lot of time in the college canteen. We also periodically skipped classes, as there were no "tardies" at the college. We could do whatever we wanted. I ate out more with my friends at restaurants and found that I rather enjoyed being social with my peers. I would ask my mom for money to buy books, knowing she would get it from my dad. My dad was somewhat easygoing when it came to financial matters, and he covered my college expenses, as was common at the time.

As I look back at my life, I believe that my college

years were the best years. During those four years, I had a carefree life with no responsibility and lots of freedom, and I enjoyed most of it. I purposely avoided taking hard classes in college and instead enjoyed the freedom of hanging out with friends, eating samosas at the college canteen, watching movies on Fridays, and enjoying my teenage life to its fullest. Even with all the fun, I graduated college majoring in economics from the University of Punjab, Pakistan.

In 1971, I was selected in a short course (only nine months to become an officer) to join the Pakistan Military Officer Academy (PMA), a major accomplishment at that time. I had worked hard to gain entry to this prestigious academy, located in Kakul, Abbottabad. I was training to be an army officer. I learned a lot of discipline there. Ironically, Osama Bin Laden was captured many years later in this area by US forces. I still wonder how he could hide so long in such a highly guarded military town.

This opportunity lasted just six months. In 1972, I was discharged from the PMA with no reason and no explanation. To this day, I still have no idea as to why they discharged me.I became depressed. I came home and was at a total loss for several months; the dejection was overwhelming. I continued to learn and trust that out of

perceived bad situations come good if we are willing to accept our situation, and this experience led my father to treat me with more kindness.

The experience at PMA, no matter how hard it was to understand at the time, gave me a new outlook towards life. I became more disciplined and learned how to let go of things instead of brooding with worry.

Later in life, I realized that leaving PMA was one of the best things that could have happened to me. It changed my future and my life. If I had stayed there in the army, I would have ended up being an army officer. I would have stayed in Pakistan, and I would not have become who I am today.

These setbacks in life made me stronger and taught me not to worry later in life when I failed, as I did numerous times.

I believe strongly that our biggest perceived failures lead us to our greatest successes. We cannot close the door on the harder experiences of the past. We can learn from our misfortunes, mistakes, and uncomfortable situations to form our higher standards and values. Throughout my life, I have learned to stay consistent by working hard and keeping my "eyes on the prize," whether in business or in my home life.

I also feel that I am not so much a "religious" person as I am more of a "spiritual" person.

Chapter 3

Marriage of Convenience

One day, during the summer of 1971, my father sat silently in his old armchair in a corner of the house for a long period of time, and he looked irritable. When irritated, it was his usual habit to move his toes in a nervous fashion. His face was unshaven, his eyes were droopy, and he seemed to be pondering over something serious. My mother was trying her best to pacify him, but it was not working. I was 18 years old at the time.

My cousin Bushra, who had been living with us for about two years, looked sad and disturbed. We were looking forward to her upcoming marriage to my older brother, Aziz later that year, as he was planning to return to Pakistan.

"Why is everybody so upset and sad?" I wondered.

So many reasons went through my mind. Was my father sad because of financial problems? Had our crops failed? I could not ask him why. My father was a tough disciplinarian, the sole breadwinner, and the patriarch, so these questions were not appropriate to ask him at any time, especially in a time of distress.

As I mentioned earlier, my father seldom displayed any affection to me in private or in public, and he certainly never engaged in any small talk. I could listen, standing a few feet away from him, but I lacked the authority to question him. I could sense that something bad was happening, and the only way to find out was to snoop in on conversations between my parents.

"What will I tell her father (my uncle), Saleh?" I overheard my father asking these questions, and I finally found out the reason for their worries.

In a letter to my father, Aziz had broken his engagement.

My parents were sad and worried, and they scrambled to find a solution. Everyone knew about the upcoming marriage.

Everyone at home was obviously disturbed and disappointed. We knew this situation would cause much agony and disappointment in our family.

My father desperately wanted to do something to make their union work.

In order to understand the details surrounding Aziz's engagement; I should tell you when the story began: over two decades earlier, when Aziz and my cousin, Bushra, were toddlers.

Aziz and Bushra were born only a few months apart, and our grandparents (my mother's parents) decided they should marry each other when they were of appropriate age. It was a practical and convenient decision at the time. With a nod, they finalized the union when they were mere toddlers. Such arranged marriages by parents and grandparents were quite common in those days in India and Pakistan, and cousins marrying each other was also common in Pakistan, and it did not carry the stigma that it does in Western society now.

The year was 1969. Bushra was around sixteen; her family threw an engagement party while Aziz was living in Canada. This party made the union official in the eyes of our family and to others in the community. We took a day trip to Bushra's home village of Shadiwal, attended the party and returned home with Bushra. She continued to live with us while Aziz was studying in Canada. The plan was for him to return to Pakistan and marry her after a couple of years. In hindsight, it was an odd plan set up mainly by my father and Bushra's father; however, it was convenient for the families and common in our culture.

Despite the commonality of traditional arranged marriages, I still wonder to this day why my father decided to go forward with it. In Sahiwal, Bushra was treated

equally as though she was a member of our immediate family. She performed regular household chores along with my younger sister Seema and mother. Bushra had the freedom to go to school, and she went to the girl's college in Sahiwal.

She was four years older than me, and I was around 17 when she first came to Sahiwal.

Bushra's young life was full of tragedy and darkness, and it helped define her disposition as an adult. When Bushra was only five, her biological mother, my aunt Iqbal, who was a deeply religious and reserved woman, died in her third childbirth in her thirties. The child did not survive either. There is an interesting story about Aunt Iqbal that I have heard from family members.

A burglar came to her house and saw Iqbal on her knees praying in the early morning hours. Not wanting to disturb her and bring bad luck on himself, the thief decided to come back later. A couple of hours later, before dawn, he came back and to his amazement, there she was again, in the same spot, kneeling and praying to God. Sighing to himself, he decided to try again later. Dusk rolled around, and he was ready to try again, and there she was, at the same spot. Frustrated and angry, he finally gave up. Aunt Iqbal's faith and devout praying saved her from a potential robbery, if

not more. Unfortunately, not much else is known about Aunt Iqbal since she died so young.

After Aunt Iqbal's death, Bushra's father, Uncle Saleh, married Aunt Iqbal's younger sister, Ammi Jaan. As luck would have it, they were perfect for each other. Ammi Jaan was the opposite of her sister. She was pleasant, the life of the party, very hospitable, outspoken, fashionable, and had a "my way or the highway" attitude, something that was not common with women during those times.

She enjoyed painting her nails with deep red nail polish and putting on matching red lipstick, and she loved anything flashy. She did not spend much time praying and was not religious. Soon after their marriage, Aunt Ammi Jaan gave birth to a child almost every year.

Uncle Saleh in his young age was just as flamboyant. He was known for dressing up in a nice suit in the middle of a Pakistani summer and strutting around. He had a tattoo on his arm and wore an earring, and at that time, having a tattoo and an earring was rebellious. He was also handsome and charming, which added to his bravado.

Uncle Saleh served in the Pakistan Navy and later in life worked as a civilian officer with the Pakistan government in Rawalpindi.

He owned three houses and land in Shadiwal, a village near the city of Gujarat. His favorite house was in the center of Shadiwal, and he proudly called it the *"Sheesh Mahal"* (Palace of Mirrors).

He and Aunt Ammi Jaan seemed to be the perfect match. He loved her deeply and took great care of her. Together, they had eight children: four boys, two girls, plus Bushra and a son from my Aunt Iqbal. At a very young age, Bushra had to raise and take care of all the children and tend to the daily tasks in the household, as Aunt Ammi Jaan would spend most of her time in Rawalpindi with Uncle Saleh, leaving the young children behind in young Bushra's care.

Bushra would wake up early in the morning and start her work around the house. She had to light the firewood, so everyone could get their morning chai. Later, she cooked breakfast, cleaned, and did all the housework.

Bushra's young childhood life was quite tough while she was a little girl. Despite their flamboyancy, her parents were traditional and did not allow her to wear modern dresses or go outside the home. Bushra told me that one time, her father bought her bangles for the celebration of Eid. She was excited and put them on. When her father saw the bangles on Bushra's wrist, he got upset and shouted, "Tell

her to take them off. I don't like them." Ammi Jaan immediately ordered Bushra to remove the bangles. She had to wear a *purdah* [veil] and was not allowed to show her face in public. This was due to rigid rules in those days imposed on girls by parents. Bushra was not allowed to follow her father and stepmother's carefree and often flamboyant attitude towards life; instead, she was expected to quietly work in the home and to follow strict customary rules.

Bushra did not complain and suffered in silence. She woke up without protest every morning to complete a myriad of chores. She pumped water from the well and poured it into buckets so the family could use it for cooking, cleaning and bathing. There were lots of clothes she had to wash for the large family. Once they were washed, they had to be hand wrung. She had to beat them on a cement slab and hang them on long lines attached to poles, so they could dry in the sun.

Day in and day out, Bushra made countless *rotis* (flat round bread cooked on a griddle) from scratch. She pounded the dough with her bare hands, mixed it with water and salt, shaped it with her knuckles into circles, and finally put these in the pan. This was an excruciating and taxing process that hurt her hands.

Most days, the hot sparks from the firewood would hit her face, but still, she did not complain. These were typical tasks for a Pakistani village girl who was the eldest in the family.

Bushra was the *baji* [elder sister] to all her siblings, including the stepbrothers and stepsisters. When Baji got upset, her brothers and sisters knew she was an enforcer, responsible for discipline in the household. One common form of discipline at the time was admonishing with sticks, a punishment all her siblings feared.

"When we were young, we were scared to death of Baji," her youngest sister once told me.

"Baji is coming; go hide," the siblings would say as soon as they sensed she was somewhere around. She was known to be so fierce that the boys and the girls in the house feared what she would do if she really got angry. "My childhood was much tougher than yours," she once told her youngest sister later in life. "You were the youngest one, and you were so spoiled." Bushra was doing as was expected as the eldest daughter of the household, and often her actions were against her true nature, as she was kindhearted and generous. These traits were able to surface more freely later in her life.

Her stepmother Ammi Jaan was a meticulous taskmaster. Bushra learned a lot of her habits from Ammi Jaan, and Ammi Jaan conversely learned a lot from Bushra. They often mimicked each other's habits. Ammi Jaan was a stickler for cleanliness and would always rinse the plates in hot water before serving food as well as rinse every teacup in hot water before serving chai, and Bushra picked up many of the same habits.

They both always held a napkin in their hands and loved wearing red lipstick and red nail polish. Bushra was very particular with her clothes and loved wearing black. As they grew older, their affection for one another grew apparent, and one rarely said anything bad about the other.

Once Bushra completed tenth grade in Shadiwal, her father enrolled her in a government-run teacher's training program. She worked as a teacher in a dilapidated middle school close to her home and taught children general subjects in Urdu. Here, she handpicked three to four students from her class to help her with her household chores. In an unexpected development, one of the girls developed a deep admiration for her and used to write her long letters of appreciation, even after Bushra moved away. This is one of many cases where Bushra's strong compassion and empathy for others was very clear.

Although she could be tough, she always had a kind and generous spirit.

Meanwhile, Pakistan in the late 1960s was a hard place to be a teenager, especially for girls. While the rest of the world had the Beatles, Elvis, the Rolling Stones, and dance parties, we were held back by centuries of traditions and rules. Girls and boys were not allowed to interact; we could not speak to one another, and we certainly were not permitted to date each other.

In the area where I grew up, the consequences for breaking any of these rules were harsh, especially if you were a girl. If for any reason it became public that a girl was involved in any kind of romantic affair with a boy, she would live in dishonor and shame.

It was better for the boys. People may gossip that he was a bad boy, but he could get a job and get married and eventually lead a normal life. We all knew that if we flirted with each other and if people found out, we were playing with fire, and no matter how innocent, the incident could damage our lives and that of our families. Regardless of this realization, we were just teenagers, enjoying coming-of-age, and in truth, the extra danger made it even more exciting.

There were many reasons why there were such strict rules about interacting with girls. The primary reason was

the objectification of women and sadly, in most parts of the world, it still happens. A woman's value came from her virtue and ability to bear children. So, their purity and virginity needed to be guarded. Since it only mattered that they could become pregnant, no one really invested in a girl's education or considered any other possibilities for their lives.

Furthermore, women in Pakistan were considered an inferior species whose only job was to cook, give birth, look after the kids, stay inside the home, and once married, always listen to their husbands. Prior to marriage, girls had to obey their fathers, brothers, and males in general, and there were strict rules about the clothes they wore.

Especially in the villages, fathers, sons, and husbands treated women like livestock. It was extremely disturbing. Having seen all this, I now always tell my cousins and any other relatives who will listen to educate their daughters. Push them to work and allow them to enjoy the fruits of their labor. Working and earning money is a satisfactory task that should be enjoyed by all, regardless of race or gender.

I was a shy and playful teenager, though I was a somewhat stubborn kid. Around adults, I was quiet. During that time, there were many "Road Romeos" (catcallers) in

Pakistan. If you have done any world travelling, I'm sure you have seen one on the busy streets of any South Asian city. They usually stand on the corner with a bunch of their friends with nothing to do but make passing comments at nice-looking girls walking down the streets. The practice still happens around any construction site in the US in almost any large metropolitan area. I'm happy to say that I was not part of that group, and I did not like their presence because I felt it would lower my standards and ideals if I became one of them.

In contrast to the traditional attire women were required to wear, most men wore Western clothes. I commonly did while outside the house, but at home, I stuck to pajamas and the traditional shalwar kameez. As a teenager in the late 60s and 70s, I was around five feet, ten inches tall, and weighed around 150 pounds. I was thin built, had a moustache, no beard, and short hair. During Eid, I would wear an overcoat and had a collection of bell-bottoms, as was the fashion of the day.

As a teenage college student, this was my reality: friends, movies, and studying. That probably describes the life of any teenager in that part of the world. But it was a different reality from what my father was going through. He was in the middle of a family crisis. Even though I felt for

my father, I had no advice or emotions towards his self-created situation.

As the days progressed, Bushra became more depressed, and one day, she overdosed on the antiseptic Dettol, falsely thinking that this would reduce her sorrows. She became sick, started vomiting intermittently and a doctor was summoned to our home. Luckily, in a few days, she felt better and recovered fully.

After this episode, my father became quite concerned and worried. He was afraid she would do something drastic that would bring greater shame and sorrow to our family.

I could not imagine why Bushra would have done what she did. It could have been an accident, but I'm not naïve enough to believe that. Her pain and disappointment must have been immense at that time.

I once asked Bushra how she must have felt losing her mother at such a young age, but she had few memories of her biological mother. Her memory starts with her stepmother, Ammi Jaan.

I can't imagine how difficult and tedious it must have been for Bushra to raise her new step siblings at a very young age when she could not even take care of herself. I'm sure Bushra's depression and anxiety started during her very young pre-teenage and teenage years in Shadiwal while

living with her parents. She must have felt insecure, abandoned, unsafe, unloved, and scared.

Whereas I had the freedom to enjoy life with my friends, Bushra was always tied to responsibility, first to her family, and then to ours. The only thing she had to look forward to was, her upcoming marriage. This was the only way out of her tough life. She must have spent hours fantasizing about her new life, house, and future children. To find out so suddenly that these dreams would not happen must have been devastating.

Her taking Dettol speaks volumes. She did not see any other solution to her problems. She was upset and angry, and the only way out she could see was to flee the situation. She did not have a voice to tell anyone how she felt or to express how unjust and unfair her life was.

Meanwhile, Uncle Saleh found out about the sudden turn of events and threw a huge fit of anger. He cursed my father and our entire family, and he vowed that he would take revenge on us. He told my father that he had caused dishonor to his family by ruining his daughter's life.

"How can I justify taking my daughter back home after she was engaged?" he yelled. "You kept her for nearly two years in your home! Why did you do this to my daughter? What wrong did she do?"

Uncle Saleh's anger was primarily caused by the fact that it would be difficult for him to find a suitable husband for Bushra. Who would marry a girl who was previously engaged and had stayed at the prospective groom's house for almost two years? What if she had been abused? Did anyone know how she lived there? How would a new person or his family trust the situation? Later in life, I could understand how Uncle Saleh felt during those days. He was a father who just wanted to do the right thing for his daughter, to protect her, and to safeguard his family's honor.

The elders of both families wanted to avoid this huge new conflict, as it would hurt their honor. They searched for solutions, and the easiest one lay right in front of them.

Me.

I became the sacrificial lamb when my father chose me to wed Bushra. I was just an 18-year-old. My father told me sternly that he had decided for the family's sake that I would marry Bushra to save our family's honor and pride.

As I was a teenager, I do not remember much about my wedding. My young mind was filled with promises of a bright future with a girl of my choice, but now the tables had turned. All my dreams were shattered in an instant.

Marriage was a strange thing to me, and I did not know what I was getting into. As soon as my marriage was

arranged, my ambivalence towards Bushra turned to annoyance. It was clear she was just as unhappy about marrying me as I was of her. She was already feeling deeply rejected, and now she was to marry a man way younger than her and not even established. This likely fed into her depression even more.

You might ask why both of us did not fight against these rushed decisions.

First, it never crossed my mind that we could at that time. We both were just actors in our parents' drama, and they made a rash decision in order to uphold tradition and honor. I know I played the role of an obedient, young, naive teenage son well, but I did not know about the role of a husband or a father. I was not prepared to play these roles, yet the play had been re-cast, and I was now taking over the lead. We were both vulnerable and became pawns to uphold societal norms and the traditions of that time.

My heart was just not in it.

On the morning of my wedding day in June 1971, I woke up early and spent some time with my mother and other relatives who had come for the ceremony. My mother was sad, and it was evident that she did not like what was about to happen. She tried her best to voice her opposition, but my father's voice was much louder, and he prevailed.

After all, how could a young teenager and a mother oppose the dynamics of a male-dominated tribal society?

The wedding was hastily arranged. As a side note, my siblings' weddings and all my children's weddings were elaborate with huge celebrations. Mine was the complete opposite. It was somber and conservative.

This was an unplanned marriage designed to save a family's honor.

Bushra looked happy to get married, and she looked very nice that day. She was slim, fair, and around 5′2″ tall, weighing around 110 pounds.

Nevertheless, it was not a happy event. Not for me. Not for Bushra. Not for her family. Not for my family. The few friends and families who had been invited by my dad were present, and yet, instead of laughter and celebration, there were only whispers of gossip and questions.

"Why are the father and mother so sad?"

"He is still in college."

It was hard to hear such comments passing from people's lips into other people's ears. I do not like gossip. I did not like it then, and I still dislike it now.

Thinking back to that day, I do not have many happy memories. One of my biggest regrets was that there were no photos taken during my wedding. There was no

photographer hired even though one of my father's good friends was a photographer.

I don't have a single photo of my wedding to show to my children or grandchildren.

I would love to have some evidence of my wedding, of how beautiful Bushra looked and how handsome I looked. Yes, we looked unhappy, but we were in our prime and in hindsight, I would have loved to have a memory of that day. Sadly, there is no physical memory of any picture of my wedding whatsoever, only a mental picture. My marriage with Bushra will go down in history as one of the very few marriages in Pakistan that did not have one single photo taken at the wedding.

I would love to ask Bushra her thoughts about our marriage and me, but her memories are lost due to her dementia. The only person who remembers is me, a handful of older cousins, and my younger sister Seema.

I purposely ignored Uncle Saleh during my wedding, as I felt he was mainly responsible for pushing my father into arranging this marriage. Later in my own life, I could understand better a father's pain, especially when you are drawn into such an odd and twisted situation.

My father did not want any publicity, and he wanted to get things taken care of quickly and quietly. I felt that he

just wanted his self-created headache to be over with, so he could resume his life freely.

After our marriage, in the summer of 1972, Bushra and I visited a palmist named Sajjad in Farid Town, Sahiwal. Sajjad was a knowledgeable and highly regarded palm reader in those days who claimed he could predict your future.

He read my hand first and said, "You have a bright future, and you will do very well in life."

He also read Bushra's hand and said, "You will be going to Canada soon. You have a lucky hand with a good future, and your young husband Younas will become a rich man."

I was surprised as I did not want Bushra to accompany me to Canada at the time. The palmist's prophecies of that time came true later in my life.

Chapter 4

Separate Lives under One Roof

The American comedian Henny Youngman used to say, "Take my wife. Please." Audiences would always howl with laughter when they heard it, but their laughter most likely was based on fact. Marriage is hard, even in the best of circumstances.

Even if you love your spouse, you can still run into problems. It's hard to live under the same roof and deal with in-laws, children, money, and generally anything life throws at you. It was excruciatingly painful to be expected to show up every day in a marriage when I was not interested in my wife.

For the first several months, I did not even attempt to get to know Bushra. I had no honeymoon of any kind since I was so young and did not even know that such a concept even existed.

Most newlyweds have an intense excitement towards each other and cannot wait to see their beloveds, to talk to them, and to say nice things to each other. Bushra was not waiting for me with my favorite meal at the end of the day.

We did not share our intimate thoughts, wishes, and dreams with each other. It is something I have always regretted.

I wished I had a marriage where I could have shared my thoughts with my wife. Starting up a business, moving from one country to another and then another was stressful, and I did not really have anyone to share it with.

It was not easy. I was just a 19-year-old young man.

I felt as though my youth was being snatched away from me. I was forced to marry someone who was older than me, had no interest in marrying me and vice versa. In truth, neither of us even liked each other at the time, and that was excruciatingly painful.

Looking back over the ensuing years, I feel everything that happens in our lives is for a reason.

A few months after my marriage, Aziz returned home from Canada to Pakistan and got married to an educated girl from a local well-known family. His marriage was full of joy and there were lots of festivities. Several photographers lined up to take pictures.

My sister-in-law is a decent, classy, jolly and witty woman, and I have gotten along well with her throughout my life. Life has a funny way of creating detours that eventually lead us towards our destiny.

I had just joined the Pakistan Army Academy at Kakul in late 1971 as an officer-in-training and could not attend Aziz's wedding. My relationship with Aziz was strained at our early young age, but with the passage of time, such issues faded away. He is a good brother and more importantly a good friend.

From the start, Bushra and I did not have a normal husband-wife relationship. I would wake up, go to college, hang out with friends and return whenever I liked. I had no obligations to her and considered her as someone who trapped me.

She would spend most of her time cooking or cleaning the house, and my parents did not care much about us. No one provided us any advice or marriage counseling, as it was not a concept at that time.

Occasionally, Bushra would complain that my mother was not being friendly to her. I would just ignore her as if nothing had happened. There was bitterness and resentment inside both of us, towards each other and towards our families.

Bushra was somewhat stubborn at times, and even looking at our early years, her mind was filled with unhappiness, revenge, depression, and anxiety. At our early age, we used to push and shove each other, and small things led to ongoing fights and separations. All along, I badly

wanted Bushra to learn English, so she could be independent from me and assimilate more with Western society, but she did not think it was important.

Bushra in her early age was pessimistic and became upset over the smallest things. She was very loving to her children, but she was also quite tough with them. She never let any of them disobey her, even after they became adults and had their own children. I feel that I had more of a gentle nature and a way less intrusive personality.

In the early years, we both were unhappy in the marriage. Not only did she remind me of my lost youth, but I dreaded the fact that I would have to live with her the rest of my life. By the same token, she mirrored these same feelings towards me, especially during the early years of our marriage.

Overall, we did not like each other in the early years of our life. I offered several times to get peacefully separated. I even left her once in the mid-1970s in Pakistan to stay with her parents, but she would not allow that as an option. Bushra would say, "I am going to die with you. I am not going to leave you, and you will not be able to leave me."

We did not have children during the first four years of our marriage, but in 1975, Bushra gave birth to our first child, Sadia, who was indeed, a bundle of joy.

After the birth of Sadia, at the age of 22, I still had complicated and conflicted feelings in my heart; however, with a child in our lives, we were a family unit now, and that made it much more difficult to leave. After the birth of my son, Babar, I could not bring myself to ask for a divorce. I was 24 at the time. I kept asking myself, how could I reject my two children? How could I let Bushra bring up our children on her own? My heart would not let me divorce her.

I had to find a place in my mind where I could come to peace with the life that was chosen for me. It was hard for me at the time. There were still days and months when I had the old feelings of resentment, fear, regret, and sadness. What could Bushra or my children do about it? Bushra did not want to marry me, either.

Again, we were forced to be actors in someone else's play.

Marriage is not easy for anyone, regardless of the circumstances. Two people who come together to live under one roof, one custom, one religion, and one ritual and then bring children into the world are taking part in God's work.

Family is the foundation of society. It's important to preserve it and to make sure it thrives. Even though I had a tough time accepting my marriage in the early years, I believe in the sanctity of this union. When it came time for my

children to get married and to create their own families, I was quite involved. I offered them my love and advice. After all these years, I can narrow down my advice to three things: compatibility, compromise, and passion.

The world has changed since I was a teenager living in Pakistan. Some of the changes have surprised me, but most have been good, especially when it comes to women's rights. I'm glad that we are emphasizing women's education and their right to speak out about issues they face. It is clear women are still not given equal opportunities and protections here in the West as well in the East. But the recent lack of equality and the "Me Too" movements have shown us how far we still have to go to make sure women feel safe in society.

Similarly, we need to make sure women feel safe in their marriages, and the best way we can do that is by making sure they are compatible with their partners. We are often raised to believe that our parents know best, to which I partially agree. I was involved in finding my children's partners. I was familiar with their personalities, their idiosyncrasies, and quirks, and I wanted to be sure they were able to spend time with their prospective partners in order to understand these habits and behaviors. If they were unable to find a compromise in personalities, and did not really enjoy one another, how would they ever make big decisions, like

raising children and buying a home, and furthermore, how could they honestly find happiness? I also wanted to maintain my family's honor by seeking out partners for my children who had stable and reputable families, as they would now be a part of ours. Family and lineage are important, and I wanted to ensure this was maintained for my children.

Compatibility is essential, but it doesn't solve everything. Once you are in a marriage, compromise is necessary, and it is hard. Take it from a businessman who has negotiated and closed a lot of deals: it's hard to come to a compromise. Give-and-take is imperative, both in business and in marriage.

Compromise is another key factor. As to my business time and concentration, I'm a self-confessed workaholic. I love to work, watch my costs and make deals. Bushra never pushed me to be someone else. This is what I tell my children: learn to accept each other and learn to compromise.

Passion. We assume that we need a passionate relationship for marriage to last. I believe in that. You must have a passion for life as a whole. This begins with a passion for something, anything: a hobby, a cause, a goal, or like me, a passion towards work. Passion motivates you to keep striving and aiming higher in order to live life fully. It trickles into your being without you knowing. When you find

something to cultivate passion, it spreads into all facets of life. This is what motivated me out of Pakistan, helped me survive the frigid cold winters of Edmonton, and take on the flat plains of Kansas. My passion for learning led me to direct sales and then to the oil and gas business. Furthermore, it is what motivated me to get up each morning and to keep curiously working.

So, why is this passion important for a happy marriage?

Too often, we get married and become complacent. Bushra was guilty of this by her own circumstances. I would be at work, and she would stay at home. I encouraged her to learn English, taking greater responsibility at home such as gathering expenses, paying the household bills, writing checks, anything to increase her self-worth. Yet, she seemed disinterested in any of that.

This was unfortunate; had she kept herself busy with a passion, she might have saved herself from her current unfortunate illness.

On several occasions after we left Pakistan, I found tutors and teachers for her so they could teach her English, but she was never interested. I found a wonderful English teacher for her in Houston. Bushra would meet her, drink tea with her,

and go through sales magazines and pictures, but she would never learn anything from her.

I also found a young student who would come to the house and speak to her in English. Of course, Bushra was kind to her and always treated her with civility but ended up speaking to her in her native language, Urdu. I tried it several times, but it was fruitless. She just was not interested. I wish she had a passion that she could have pursued, like the one I had. Sitting at home with nothing to do is not a way to live your life, and even more importantly, it does not make for a good partnership in marriage. If she had gone out into the world, she would have experienced so much more. Her only passion and interests were in buying expensive clothing and jewelry, especially in the past two decades before her illness.

To this day, I see lots of females all around our culture who seem unhappy and are stuck in the mold of the older generation. I continue to encourage them to find a job and to cultivate their passion in whatever it is they wish out of life.

For the women who are reading this book, I implore you to go do some sort of work or a hobby that you love. Furthermore, I encourage anyone, of any race, class, and gender, to stay curious and become involved in something that makes you excited. We have but one life to live, and we have many resources at our fingertips. I have learned that all we

have to do is say yes, be passionate and stay motivated. Furthermore, there are a lot of girls in rural parts of Pakistan, and many parts of the world, who do not have the opportunity to have an education. We need to assist them to get them educated and encourage them to take risks in order to cultivate their strengths. We need to give back to encourage others to grow.

Recently, I was listening to the story of Khalida Brohi, a young girl whose cousin was murdered to restore her family's honor. Khalida loved her cousin and could not understand why she needed to be taken away from this world. When Khalida wanted to go to school, her whole family opposed it. Like Bushra and me, they were actors in a play they hadn't written. It was heartbreaking to hear her story, but Khalida did not give up. She pushed through, found her purpose, wrote a best-selling book, *I Should Have Honor*, opened two chai cafés in New York and Arizona, and is acting in a one-woman play she wrote.

Khalida's story is another example of how pursuing passion pays off. Passion gives purpose; it motivates and drives, cultivating better relationships, health and overall happiness.

While the first five years of our marriage were bad and filled with outbursts of anger and vengeance towards one

another, time progressed, and things did begin to shift, as they often tend to do.

Bushra's simplicity, generosity and compassion began to show more and more as time moved on. Bilkees, her youngest sister, recounts how much she loved her when she was growing up. "What my own mother should've done for me, my sister, Bushra, used to do," she said. "Bushra loved me as much as her own daughters. I do not know the reason why."

Once, when Bushra went shopping with Bilkees, she saw a salesgirl who looked sad. She felt that the salesgirl did not have money, so Bushra generously gave her cash. Bilkees pulled her aside and asked, "Baji, why are you doing this?" Instead of answering, Bushra asked Bilkees to stay out of the shop and proceeded to give the salesgirl more money.

I personally noticed this happening many times while I was traveling with her. Salesgirls and people who became familiar with us would come in droves to help her. Bushra was so innocent she had no inkling that even at certain times, she was getting taken advantage of, which I could clearly see. They knew they would be gifted handsomely. Generosity and simplicity are ingrained in Bushra's character. If she knew that someone in the family wanted help, she would go out of her way to assist them. Bushra was a very hospitable person,

and even if she met a stranger, especially if they were less fortunate, she would invite them to our home. "Come to my home. I will make chai tea for you. Let's have lunch or dinner together." Her love and affection, especially towards all her siblings, was very strong and quite evident throughout her life. She kept her close friends who were less fortunate or in some sort of trouble instead of making friends who were in a higher class, rich or did not need any support.

I felt that Bushra was more giving and generous to her siblings and with outsiders than she was with her own children after they were grown. Bushra was a very loving mother towards her four children, but she was strict with them and tried to raise them in the same traditional manner that she was used to in Pakistan. Bushra made lots of sacrifices and gave all her time for her children to try to make them better people. Bushra adored her children and her life revolved around them during her healthy years of life. In fact, our youngest son Yousuf was her baby; he is still a child in her mind as I am writing this book.

My daughters wore traditional Pakistani dresses as soon as they stepped inside the home after their school and college. They had to learn Urdu, and Bushra and I both were very involved and particular about their marriages.

Bushra wanted her daughters to get married sooner rather than later, to be able to begin a family in the prime of their lives, and to enjoy this time. My eldest daughter, Sadia, got married at only 19.

Marriage is about the union of families, culture, and roots. When we looked for prospective spouses for our children, we were focused on their bloodline, family relationships, and how they were raised as well as their background.

I hope my children, grandchildren and their children will closely pay attention to the bloodlines in future years, and I hope they marry their children into good God-loving families. For example, think about it this way:

When hiring a new employee, he/she must endure several written and technical tests to be even considered for the job. Even after the candidate is qualified, he/she is not hired until we thoroughly check their past records and their background is checked and verified. We determine a new worker's loyalty with a particular company based on their job history. Reliability, honesty and dedication of a new worker are all checked and tested. A minor flaw in their background check can lose the chance for that candidate to be hired.

Similarly, when you choose a person to live with for the rest of your life, you should or ought to verify and check

thoroughly into their family background, history, and the family bloodline.

Of course, this is just my own opinion. I know many people who have fallen in love instantly, did no research, and have lived happily married lives thereafter.

As my family grew, Bushra longed and wished to have her children stay around and be close to her, as they did traditionally in Pakistan. We expanded our big home to include additional homes, kitchens, living areas, etc., much like a compound, to accommodate all our children and their families inside the big home.

Yet today, while our large big house is fully furnished, it remains empty.

Bushra with her Parkinson's disease lives with me in another home near the Houston Galleria area. All our children have left the nest; they live near us and visit her as often as they can.

I believe the joint family system that I was raised with does not work here in America. I have learned it is vital that children be given liberty and the independence to choose their own destinies. After parents instill morality and teach their children ways to learn, work, communicate and succeed, children should be given the opportunity to build their own

nest when they are ready. This is a lesson I learned through my life experiences.

I would like to encourage and urge youngsters in America to devote time to take care of their elderly and ill folks. Our children will follow how we treat them, as this never-ending cycle will not stop if we don't take the first step. We, as an American society should perform more care, providing helping hands and dedicating our own time, compassion, love, and respect towards the ill and elderly who are living alone helplessly in our society. They need more of our time, presence, compassion, love, and company.

Chapter 5

Thirty Dollars and a Dream

I was dead tired, and I could no longer stand the bland smell of European food.

"I'm glad we can finally step off the plane," I said, as we disembarked in Montreal, our first port of entry into Canada. Bushra and I had been sitting on airplanes and airports for the last 23 hours.

We lined up for immigration clearance and stood calmly, ready to face a Canadian immigration and customs officer. I was nervous and kept wondering as the immigration line moved slowly: "What will he ask?"

With just $30 in my pocket and 6,300 miles away from my home, this was my last hurdle to enter the new country I had dreamed about.

The officer looked up from our passports and asked, "How many suitcases do you have?"

"Four suitcases, sir," I said.

"Only four? Is this all you have?" he said surprisingly.

"Yes, sir," I replied.

"Do you have any more luggage coming later? Did you know you can bring in all your household items and furniture from Pakistan as a landed immigrant?" he asked.

I nodded in acknowledgement. Something on my visa caught his eye; he smiled and asked, "Do you know what this note says?" I began to get slightly worried.

"This says that without your wife, you will not be permitted to enter Canada," he said with a chuckle. He was teasing us.

I smiled and quietly breathed a sigh of relief. He stamped both of our passports and handed them back to us.

"Welcome to Canada!" he said proudly.

"Thank you, sir," I replied. Canada welcomed us with kindness, humor, and generosity in November 1973.

The seeds of my Canadian dream had been planted two years earlier in 1971.

My brother Aziz had sponsored both Bushra and me to move to Canada. For over a year, I read about Canada: about her massive land area, her people, and her culture. I was smitten.

The seeds began to take root, and I began to dream big.

My initial goal was honorable. I wanted to make a lot of money and send it back home so my parents could live

more comfortably. Then, after a few years, we would move back to Pakistan.

I parted with my parents and relatives in Pakistan at a crowded farewell. A group of more than 20 family members, including my parents, my younger sister Seema, uncles, and close relatives had come to our home, and later to the Sahiwal railway station, to see us off. As the loudspeakers announced the train's departure, little Seema's sobs grew louder. She cried hard, and my mother's eyes welled up as the Awami Express train departed the station to Karachi. While the mood was somber, I couldn't help but be excited to get out of Pakistan. I grasped the iron railing on the train's window, looked back and bid farewell to my entire family and the city where I was born and raised.

Like so many other events in my life, for better or worse, it was like a scene from a Bollywood movie.

As the plane began its descent into our final Canadian destination of Edmonton, I saw the glimmering lights of a sprawling city. The sun had just set when we arrived. We stepped off the plane and Aziz and my sister-in-law were waiting for us.

It was very cold, and as I exhaled, white air from my mouth made it seem like I was smoking. There were several inches of snow on the ground, and my shoes from Pakistan

weren't designed to handle it. Aziz held my hand as we walked on the slippery pavement to his car. In the coming months, Aziz and my sister-in-law would continue to help both of us as we literally gained our footing in a new country.

As we searched for Aziz's car, I marveled at the sight of so many cars parked in the parking lot. I was happy to see Aziz's big car with blue and white colors. I remember seeing a logo with an odd-sounding name on his car.

"*Bhai* (elder brothers are called with respect), what does that mean?" I asked.

It was the name of the company he worked for: Schlumberger. Aziz was an engineer, and he worked in the oil fields and made good money.

We drove to his home in the south side of Edmonton, an older home he was renting from an elderly lady. I looked out and saw snow-covered streets, so vastly different from my hometown. The last time I saw snow was in Murree, a mountainous resort town near Islamabad, Pakistan. That was just a dusting of snowflakes compared to the several inches of snow I saw on the ground in Edmonton.

The next day, I awoke to the Canadian "sunshine." It was crisp and cold. I placed my hand on the frosty windows of my bedroom and the cold numbed my bones. This was a strange, new experience for me.

I explored my brother's home and was fascinated to see a new, modern kitchen, just like in the Western movies. Back in Pakistan, we used to sit together on the floor next to my mother where she would cook. We would gather and eat food in a kitchen next to the stove which was placed right there on the ground. The new customs and experiences were innumerable, and I was intrigued from the start.

My brother asked what I wanted to eat. I jokingly said ice cream. We walked to a nearby corner store owned by a middle-aged Asian couple. The store reminded me of the small grocery stores littered throughout Pakistan. Aziz got me a one-gallon tub of vanilla ice cream. I was surprised: a one-gallon container? I had eaten only tiny ice cream in cups and popsicles back home.

The gallon tub did not stand a chance. I finished it in a very short period of time.

Throughout my stay at my brother's home, I frequently visited this corner store, as it was just a short walk away, and I became friendly with the couple.

A few days after my arrival, Aziz encouraged me to start job hunting. Of course, I was eager to start working so that I could start earning money.

"You've enjoyed life in Pakistan, but now you are in Canada. If you don't work, you won't make any money.

Success is what you want out of this opportunity, so let's start job hunting," Aziz reminded me.

I have three siblings: Aziz, Misha, and Seema. All my siblings are settled in America and married, with children and grandchildren. Aziz is the oldest of my siblings, and as I mentioned earlier, he was my parent's favorite. Aziz was my mother's lifeline, her love, sweetheart and he could do nothing wrong in my mother's eyes. Aziz was everything to my mother, and the three children had no chance in Aziz's presence. Seema was very close to my mother as she took care of my mother a lot, though she and I would get no attention from my mother when Aziz was around. From a young age, my father had enrolled Aziz in a prestigious boarding school, and by 15, he had already started flying a glider in Pakistan. He wanted to be a pilot for the Pakistani Air Force, but that did not work out for him. So, he chose engineering and enrolled at the University of Alberta, Canada, in 1967.

I, on the other hand, was sent by my father to schools that were considered lower in overall rankings. Therefore, my educational foundation was quite weak. I had been academically starved in all my grade school classes. Yet somehow, I managed to persist and earned a degree in economics from the University of Punjab.

Finding my first job in Edmonton proved to be interesting. My plan was to earn lots of money as quickly as I possibly could. I wanted to become rich in a day.

I did a lot of daydreaming but did not have any concrete plans.

As I made each dollar, I would convert it in my mind to Pakistani rupees, and it was just magical. At the time, the Canadian dollar was worth 60-70 rupees, a sum I could hardly wrap my mind around. It was truly remarkable.

My English was poor, I had no other skills, and I lacked the experience to apply for a well-paying job. But I was not short of big dreams, and I had the fire in my belly to succeed. Often, I thought of the advice that my parents gave me: "Be good, Younas, and be nice to everyone and always pray to God." I knew that even with the tough life they had chosen for me, they still had high hopes that I would make something of myself.

Aziz helped me in my first job search. We went to the Army and Navy Department Store, a popular local discount store where we bought clothes to prepare us for the Canadian winter. Our winter coats from Pakistan were useless and wouldn't stand a chance in the extreme cold of Alberta. The store was perfect for us, as we did not have much money to spend.

Here, for the first time in my life, I interacted with a young Indian man who was a salesman at that store. Those were the times when India and Pakistan were hostile towards one another, but we were in Canada now, and hostilities would have been a needless waste of time.

Everything was affordable at that store. Aziz purchased for me a huge heavy coat, snow boots, jeans, a comfortable fluffy hat, and gloves.

"This is so heavy. I will start sweating!" I joked. But then he took me outside and showed me how cold it was, and I realized these were essential items. He also purchased winter clothes for Bushra.

I put my nose to the grindstone, as my priority was to find a job. Aziz told me to scour through the classified sections of the local newspaper, the *Edmonton Journal*, and call people who were advertising for jobs. My accent was too thick for locals to understand and this did not work well. When my brother got off from work or had days off, he would take me around the city in his car and look for places that had posted "Help Wanted" signs.

On one of our job-hunting trips, we found a welding shop that was hiring, and while I did not have any welding experience, this did not deter me. I went in and asked about the job opening. They immediately sent me to the Human

Resources department where I met with a friendly, heavy-set, middle-aged man wearing a long blue coat. He told me he was the shop foreman and asked me a few questions. Later, I realized he was just sizing me up to see if I could physically handle the equipment. This shop was desperately looking for workers and I just happened to be in the right place at the right time. Immediately afterwards, I signed paperwork and was told I would be earning $3.31 per hour. I knew at the time that the minimum wage was $3, so I was extremely happy. I had my first job!

I was excited. I ran out to my brother who was waiting in his car and told him, "Bhai, I got it! They are going to pay me $3.31 an hour." He had a cold look on his face and told me that I should have negotiated more. "You should have told them you had previous experience as a welder in Pakistan," he said. But I was new, and I did not want to tell a white lie. He encouraged me to be confident and ask for more money during future interviews. His stoic response did not dampen my excitement.

The next day, I crawled out of my bed from under a warm blanket and looked at the clock. It was 5 a.m.—time to get up and start my first Canadian job as a welder's helper at Metal Fabricators.

I brushed my teeth, took a shower, and gently unrolled my prayer rug. Islam's holiest site, the Ka'abah, faced the Northwest, thousands of miles away in the Arabian Desert. I gently clasped my hands, kneeled and prayed facing the Ka'abah: "We have awoken, and all of creation has awoken, for Allah, Lord of all the worlds. Allah, I ask you for the best the day has to offer, victory, support, light, blessings, and guidance; and I seek refuge in You from the evil in it, and the evil to come after it." Thereafter, I read the Holy Quran for about 15 minutes and then my regular day began.

I had always been an early riser, and for this I was grateful. I left home for work around 6 am, mostly eating milk and cereal for breakfast. On good days, a leftover roti from the night before would bring me a lot of joy. I loved our food for breakfast and sometimes I would make an omelet with some vegetables and spice it up with pepper and mint.

On my first day, I met Darrel, the shop foreman, and he gave me gloves, goggles, and a long coat. He introduced me to another welder who I had to shadow, and he showed me how to grind and sand the weld, so it became very smooth. I tried my best and he was happy with the results, and this gave a boost to my confidence. I knew I could do this job. For the first time in my life, I had to punch in and punch out on a time clock four times daily, and I knew this was to keep time, but I

did not know until later that they used it to count the hours worked, and based on the hours worked, we would get paid every two weeks.

Canada gave immigrants like me a chance to make money. I was eager to work hard and accumulate money, and the political climate favored immigrants. In 1971, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau announced that Canada would adopt policies embracing the country's multicultural dimension, a first on the world stage. He faced little opposition and the country welcomed immigrants like me during that time.

As an immigrant, I realized that will power and hard work were my biggest assets. I had already shed my pride, and I knew that a village chief's son from Pakistan must also forget his stature. There was no task beneath me if it made me money legally, and I knew there were no shortcuts and no easy wins, so I worked hard.

In the back of my mind, I always knew I had to work harder than native Canadians, since I lacked conversational English skills and my college degree from a foreign university was useless in Canada. "Everything is possible to achieve in the world, but it requires constant efforts" became my mantra.

I came to this country with only $30 in my pocket and a dream to make it big. With everything to gain and nothing to lose, I was focused on succeeding against all the odds.

During those early years, my dream was to save $100,000, return to Pakistan, invest in real estate, collect money from rent, and then never work for the rest of my life. It was a big dream for a young man, and I could have never imagined that this leap of faith would lead me to where I am today. I am simply blessed.

Metal Fabricators hired a lot of new immigrants. My co-workers were from all over the world. During our hour-long lunch break, I was amazed to see the various types of food people brought for lunch including pizza, a variety of pasta, steaks, fish, sandwiches, and other foods that were all completely foreign to me. I refused to bring our traditional roti and curry for lunch. Bushra or I would pack a sandwich with bread, lettuce, cheese, and deli turkey or beef. I wanted to assimilate into the culture, as I saw that as a steppingstone to success.

After two weeks, when I got my first paycheck, it was around $265, and that was a lot of money for me. After cashing my check, I held in my hand more money than I had ever before in my life. I sent half my paycheck to my parents and donated some to charity, as this was something that I learned growing up in Pakistan: take care of family and give to others. Giving back became a lifelong habit of mine, as I saw value in helping others.

While earning money was exciting and worthwhile, working as a welder's helper at Metal Fabricators shop took a toll on me physically and emotionally. Every day, the welding machine would violently spray sparks that would often strike me like arrows on a dartboard. My ears would hurt as a result of the constant grinding sound from the machine: "Krrrr…krr...krrr…" this went on endlessly for an entire eight-hour shift.

I was given difficult projects and little to no overtime or any additional benefits. Earning just $3.31 an hour, I was not accomplishing or learning much. The days became tougher, and I decided that I must find new ways to earn more money with less hardships.

My main form of transportation to and from work was the local bus system. It was about this time that Edmonton saw its first major local bus strike. Most of the workers at the Edmonton Amalgamated Transit Workers Union wanted a 37-percent wage increase and the city had no interest in meeting their demands.

An estimated 70,000 people who used the bus service daily soon started driving cars. Others began using their bicycles. I had neither; I had to use my thumbs and hitchhike. My job was 30 minutes by car, over an hour by bus and it usually took close to two hours if I hitchhiked. My options

were limited, and hitchhiking proved to be the best way to get to work.

It was the early 1970s. Edmonton had brutal, windy, frigid winters and here I was, forced to hitchhike. I would walk on the streets as I waited for someone to be driving toward the direction of my home. Sometimes, I would wait on corners and my feet and hands would quickly become numb with the bitter cold. I would take a break from walking and go into corner stores to get warm so I wouldn't freeze to death. I would wait in the biting cold for strangers to give me a ride to and from work, everyday; this was dangerous and risky, but it was the only way I could continue to make a living. I was grateful for the generosity and kindness of others during this time.

"Why am I here?" I could quickly freeze to death. "This is so discouraging." I would sometimes say these things to myself.

But Canadians were kind, and they would stop to offer most anyone like me lifts to our next destination. When I got into the car, some cranked up the heat to make me comfortable while others simply asked me questions about who I was and where I came from. Many were curious about me.

I met a lot of interesting people during the bus strike. I did notice I got a lot of lifts from younger drivers around my age. A lot of them were interested in knowing more about me and asked me all sorts of questions. "Where are you from? What brings you here? Where is Pakistan?" I noticed that no one was afraid or scared of me at all. Similarly, I was usually never fearful of the drivers either. I did not have any dangerous experiences while I hitchhiked. I had one young person who persistently invited me to accompany him to his apartment; however, after I refused, the person relented and dropped me at my destination. For the most part, it was a positive experience that gave me the chance to interact with locals and further adapt to the culture.

The bus strike was a public nuisance. People lost jobs, and retail businesses saw steep declines in sales during the Christmas season. The strike lasted 50 days but ended with the Union getting a new contract that increased the workers' wages. I was happy for it to be over.

Meanwhile, my brother and sister-in-law were ready to welcome their first child in January 1980, and they wanted to leave their rental house for something larger and more appropriate for a family. They began looking to rent a townhome in Millwood, a new sub-division. I could see the writing on the wall, and it said, "We need you to find a place

of your own." They were polite in telling me that it was time to go and find my own place. My brother had also sublet the basement of their current house to a Pakistani student, Mahni, who lived there with his girlfriend. They too had to find a new place to stay. But I've always been one to roll with the punches, and luckily, I found an apartment and moved closer to Bushra's workplace in early 1980.

Aziz and I got off on shaky ground in the early years of our life due to circumstances, but our relationship blossomed over the years. My brother, Aziz, is a shrewd businessman and a good helpful brother. He has helped the family and others and is a smart man. In fact, Aziz is much sharper and smarter than me. I am blessed and grateful to have a good relationship with all of my siblings to this day.

Meanwhile, Bushra found new friends from India, Ramesh and Tara, and, initially, I did not like them because they were of Indian origin. The Indo-Pak Wars of 1965 and 1971 had clouded my perception of Indians, especially Hindus, and I had mistakenly thought they were not good people and not trustworthy. Ramesh, however, would help us whenever we were in need, and slowly, we became good friends, life-long friends in fact.

When I started looking for apartments, I had limited choices as I was making very little money. I wanted a nice

apartment, but I knew that higher rentals were not for me, so I looked at the best I could get within my budget.

After living in a less-than-adequate village with dusty and muddy dirt roads during the early years of my life, virtually anything was better.

Sometimes, when I asked about the nicer apartments, the managers would look at me with skepticism, as they knew from my appearance that I was new to the country and was just settling down. I could almost hear them thinking, "How can this *Paki* afford this apartment with all these modern amenities?" (*Paki* was a slang word used by locals for almost every South Asian during the 1970s and 1980s.)

My search finally ended, and I rented the smallest and most affordable apartment I could find. It was located in a congested neighborhood with rows and rows of apartments of innumerable shapes and sizes. I could see kids playing at a park nearby and it was only five to ten minutes from downtown Edmonton. I could see the CN Tower from the main street. In the mid-1970s, it was a beacon at the time, with a red light, a symbol that I would use to navigate the city.

Bushra started working at Edmonton's iconic Great Western Garment Company (GWG). Our apartment was a short walking distance from her work and just a few minutes away from the main bus line.

Our first apartment certainly had its share of drama. A few days after we moved in, the police knocked on our door. We were worried. "Did you hear anything coming from the third floor?" the officer asked. "No, sir," we replied. The couple on the third floor had quarreled and the police were called in to settle a domestic dispute.

We became scared right off the bat.

Drunken brawls were common there, and so we quickly decided to move to a one-bedroom apartment a couple of blocks away. Ramesh came in his old car, a Gremlin hatchback, to help us move, and we tied the sofa bed on top of his car and loaded up all our belongings.

My current job and looking for other opportunities consumed most of my daytime hours. During the evenings, I watched ice hockey on television and became an avid fan of the local ice hockey team, the Edmonton Oilers. I rarely missed a game, and I would have given anything to be there in person. The Oilers and Montreal Canadiens were my favorite teams, and I would grieve terribly if they lost a game. Wayne Gretzky of the Oilers, and Guy Lafleur and Ken Dryden from the Montreal Canadiens became my idols, and the last remnants of my love for soccer and cricket quickly vanished.

I was quickly becoming "Westernized." I would regularly watch the popular TV programs of the day like *Hogan's Heroes* and *The Sonny and Cher Show*. *Hogan's Heroes* was my favorite for a long time, as I had a short stint in the Pakistani military. Beyond that, I loved Colonel Klink, a funny and clumsy German military officer. He would be teased by the American soldiers and Sergeant Schultz and his antics kept me happy after a hard day's work. I delighted in watching those shows; they were funny and helped me improve my conversational skills in English.

Soon, one of my new friends gave me an idea. He said driving taxicabs would be a way to earn money quickly and this would give me the freedom to work during odd hours. I took an exam, passed it and received a taxi driver's license. I had to prove I knew the Edmonton city streets and local maps to get this license. I started exploring the city and some days, I would intentionally drive to the west side, which was the more affluent side of Edmonton. There, I would admire the big homes and dream of perhaps one day owning something as glorious.

Surprisingly, life as a cabbie was fulfilling and enjoyable. The daily cash I received was good, and I often made a daily profit of $75 or more if I hustled and worked hard. On weekends, I could clear over $100 during a single

shift, and this was after paying rent for the taxi! I learned a great deal from my time as a cabbie, and to this day I have respect for those in that profession.

During those rides, I met many interesting people. There were many intoxicated passengers that I had to pick up, but often, they were the most generous. "I am a rich guy," one inebriated passenger said to me after giving me a big tip. "Yes sir, you are indeed a very rich man," I would nod in agreement. To most of my drunk passengers, I would be polite and would tell them I was in Canada only for a short time and told them that I would be leaving back to my home country soon.

Sometimes this worked, and they would give me a bigger tip after hearing my sob story of coming from a poor country. I made it a point to help most of the drunk passengers to the door, especially the ones who were good to me.

Occasionally, some of my drunk passengers were angry or violent and I would just take the money and drop them outside their homes. Once, two Native Canadians got into my car and were angry. "Hey *Paki*, you are taking my job," one said. In fact, this was a sentiment I heard often. People would say, "Go home. Go to your *Paki* land." There were other times when people would just run away without paying me anything. I never chased anyone to collect the cab fare. I simply let it go.

During the harsh, Canadian bitter winters, taxicabs were winterized so they could be driven safely. The curvy, steep icy roads in Edmonton (especially a steep road going into downtown from the south side) required special driving skills. When it snowed, the crews cleared the snow from the main roads, but the side roads were left icy and were a challenge to drive. Driving during the winter did have its perks. People were desperate, and they would call me to get milk, bread, and other essentials. They were so happy that someone would pick them up in such bad weather that I generally received extra tips.

My life revolved around working both full-time and part-time jobs with the main intention of making the maximum amount of money. I also took another part-time job as a security guard at a shopping center called Bonneville. Here, I really enjoyed walking around the shopping center wearing a security uniform and watching people shop. I would deliberately talk to a lot of Canadians, so I could improve my English-speaking skills. I had no reservations introducing myself and talking to them, and I did not care about any mistakes I made. However, as soon as I saw a brown face, I would go and hide somewhere so they would not hear my poor English. I was concerned about speaking English in front of

brown people. I felt they would make fun of me or judge me. The Canadians did not care, and they would just move on.

My security guard job came with a few perks, including discounts on purchases at the mall. I knew exactly what I wanted to use my discounts on: ice cream. I would chat with young folks who were servers at the ice cream kiosks, and often, they would prepare and give me free ice cream!

After eight months, I left my first job at Metal Fabricators and joined Canada Packers, a meat processing plant. I was lured by more money as they paid much higher wages of between $8 and $10 an hour. Remember, every Canadian dollar was worth 60-70 rupees. I was still of the mindset that I would return to Pakistan to fulfill my dream.

I worked on the assembly line, or "the chain" as the workers would call it. My job was to saw off different cuts of meat from the hanging carcass of a cow. This was physically excruciating and bloody work in the cold coolers; it required me to use all the muscles in my body while standing in puddles of dripping cow blood. This was very different from milking a cow and not nearly as rewarding. The job was repetitive, with short breaks. It was a cold place to work, and after five months, I realized that I could not continue the back-breaking work. Sometimes, it takes small failures to find great

successes, and I knew that if I kept searching, working hard, and doing the right thing, success would surely come.

While driving the cab, Ramesh, who was working as a power plant engineer at the University of Alberta, encouraged me to find a job as a power plant trainee at the local government power plant. He told me to take a power plant engineer's training course. I purchased books, studied for it, took the exam and passed it just like that. I now had the certification, and shortly thereafter, I got a job at a power plant. I would work 12-hour shifts with several days off, and this gave me the opportunity to spend the rest of my time making money as a cab driver.

Later, I got a day job as a maintenance technician with the Government of Alberta, and that became my day shift. There, I worked with Stan, an older man who had worked there for over 25 years. Stan and I would have lunch in the lunchroom. While he ate, I would see him open a small pocket-sized notebook almost every day and gaze at it while smiling. One day, I asked, "Stan what are you looking at, and why are you smiling?" He kept quiet for a while with a big smile on his face.

"It's my retirement account, and it is worth over $60,000!" he said.

Stan was a single man and a local Canadian who opened up to me, telling me all his plans and dreams for his retirement in a few years. He told me about all his vacation plans and the new Volvo car that he would buy.

One day, Stan asked me how much money I wanted to make when I retired. I thought a little, and then I told him I wanted to make $100,000, and when I did, I would quit my job and enjoy the rest of my life. That was my biggest dream at the time. Little did I know that my future would far surpass that dream of a village boy whose roots came from muddy dirt roads. Those roads would later take him to the oilfields of America.

These were the mid-seventies, and in 1976, a Canadian entrepreneur, Bernard (Bernie) Lofchick was becoming a leader in selling cookware door-to-door. His company, Worldwide Distributors, a direct sales organization, focused on cookware and china, and their main product was Queen Anne pots and pans. They had placed an advertisement in the *Edmonton Journal* stating: "Aggressive salesmen ready to earn big money needed immediately." I was intrigued by this advertisement and wondered: "How can I get this job to make lots of money?"

My close friend Khalid Sehbai and I applied for jobs there, and we were hired as commissioned salesmen. We

became very good at selling pots and pans. A bright young man, Arnie Williams, ran the Edmonton branch office at the time.

I did not have any experience in this job, but very soon, I became adept at strategically identifying apartments and homes in rural parts of Edmonton where mostly young single girls and couples were just starting out. I would knock on these doors, and it would be quite easy to sell pots and pans to this demographic.

My car was loaded with a large demonstration suitcase with sample pots and pans. I would gently knock on doors and my sales call would begin. As soon as the lady of the house opened the door, I would ask: "Madam, would you like to go to Hawaii on an all-expenses paid free trip including airfare and hotel?" I would hand her a bright, blue-colored flyer saying: "Free Trip to Hawaii!" They would be so thrilled with the offer that they would let me into their homes.

Once I was welcomed inside the home, the rest was easy.

I would slowly switch the conversation to pots and pans. I knew I had to make the sale fast and close the deal in less than thirty minutes. Lofchick's firm trained us to excel in sales, and we used a lot of gimmicks to convince people. I would run my fingers on the corners of the china plates and

glasses, and it would make a "ting" sound. I would say, "See the quality of the product."

Next, I would rub my fingers around the top of the glassware, and it would resonate a perfect pitch. Most of my customers were quickly impressed, and if they still weren't convinced, I would tell them that their existing utensils could cause disease and could possibly have an adverse impact on their health. Most customers at that point were ready to pay for the pots. At times, my sales pitch and tricks did not work; not even the Hawaii trip gimmick could convince them, and people would say no. I never took it personally and I simply moved on to the next prospect.

I was excellent at door-to-door sales, and I made $100 on each $499 sale. The more pots and pans I sold, the more money I made. My sales numbers started increasing and upper-level people, including Bernie Lofchick, began to take note of my progress.

I soon became a top salesman. I slowly began to perfect my skill of selling pots and pans.

Bernie Lofchick flew me to his corporate headquarters in Winnipeg, showed me around his office, and he invited me to his house. I realized he was trying to convince me that I could accomplish a lot and grow as a manager within his company. The deal that he offered as a manager was a

lucrative opportunity, as each time one of my salesmen made a sale, I would automatically receive a percentage above and beyond the commission generated out of my own individual sales.

I did not have the self-esteem to think long-term, nor did I have the right mindset. I was more like a frog barely keeping afloat in a small well. I could not see my potential. Lofchick was trying to show me the ocean, but I was still stuck in the well—but not for long.

Selling pots and pans was a springboard to becoming a better salesman, and it helped me sharpen my negotiation skills. I realized at this time that I had a desire to be in business for myself, to be an entrepreneur. Khalid, Ramesh and I decided to launch a new business selling pots and pans, and we started purchasing them directly from another vendor. We agreed that we would split whatever profit we made.

Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately), I lost interest in this three-way partnership, and I soon realized working with friends was not a good business move, something that has stayed with me to this day. Furthermore, this particular industry did not seem to be congruent with my long-term plans. This did, however, propel me into business, and for that I am truly grateful.

There were many hardships I encountered as I ventured into entrepreneurship. I recall one event in particular. In 1976, my friend Mahmood and I approached a bank for a loan to buy a gas station in Edmonton. It was lunchtime when we reached the bank, and they said the manager had gone to lunch but would return a bit later. So, we went to a nearby restaurant to grab a bite to eat. Mahmood ordered one of his favorite beers and began drinking. He ended up getting a bit tipsy. We returned to the bank after lunch, and it was evident that Mahmood was in no condition to negotiate; his eyes were reddish, his language was incomprehensible, and he had a hard time walking straight.

I just had a few minutes to make our pitch to the bank manager. As the conversation moved forward, Mahmood, who had sat quietly up to this point, began to interrupt her to ask her where the restroom was, a question that was ill-timed and inappropriate since in those days, local banks in general did not offer public restrooms. I knew the deal was over at that very moment, and we left with the bank having denied us a loan.

I was upset at Mahmood and when we left, he told me: "I just asked her permission to go to the bathroom. Why did she deny the loan?" He later told me to ask Aziz for a loan,

and my brother laughed it off saying: "Do you think I'm out of my mind to give you a loan just so Mahmood can waste it?"

That was the end of that dream.

I have many mid-1970s fond memories of Mahmood, as he was an exuberant, funny man. My friendship with him added color to my mundane existence.

During my first year in Canada, Pakistan kept calling me back, and I still wanted to make a good amount of money and leave Edmonton. I was very frugal. At home, we would buy the cheapest cuts of meat, we had just a few pieces of inexpensive furniture, and we always looked for sale prices at the stores. I also began to supplement my many incomes by buying and selling used cars. I saved the money from my used car sales business, and during my early days, I would send half my paycheck to Pakistan to my father. I kept in touch with the events at home through mail and through Al Fazal, a newsletter from the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Islam (AMI).

I was somewhat envious of Aziz, as he was moving around in a different and higher class of society in Edmonton. His friends were well-to-do, more educated, and had been living in Edmonton for a longer time than I. With the passage of time, our visits became few and far between, and Aziz later moved to Calgary.

As the days passed, I soon found friends among new Pakistani immigrants who were also Ahmadi Muslims. AMI's Canadian headquarters was in Toronto, and as people migrated to different cities, they would inform them of other Ahmadi Muslims in the area. This led us to get to know one another in the same area. During those days, there were no mosques in Edmonton. We decided to gather together on Friday to worship, even though we did not have a set place at the time.

These gatherings were far from traditional. During the weekly Friday sermons, men and women did not sit in separate gatherings. There were few purdahs, no screen doors or curtains separating men and women during our gatherings. The ladies would sit separate behind the men. Still, this was important to me, as it connected me to my heritage. The ladies would make pizza on Friday evenings, and we would meet at someone's home or apartment. Boston Pizza was the most popular local brand of pizza at that time, but we could not afford any name-brand pizza. So, we would buy meat, cheese, and dough in bulk and make pizza at our homes from scratch. We discussed Pakistani politics and the tension with India, ate pizza, and bonded with one another.

The gatherings were fun and a diversion from daily life, but I was still highly focused on making money in Edmonton, saving it, and sending it over to Pakistan.

I really got a special kick out of making successful deals, especially selling used cars. Every time I raked in a profit, I wanted to keep doing it. I still loved the feeling of exhilaration when I solidified a sale, and I became adept at negotiating and making profitable deals. Of course, I had my share of bad deals too, from which I learned so much.

Meanwhile, Aziz was moving up the career ladder, and he purchased a brand-new home in Mill Woods, a new subdivision. He paid $40,000 for the new house, a big deal at that time, and we had plenty of celebrations. I helped him build a garage in that home. A little bit of envy set in, and I became interested in buying a home as well.

This envy prompted me to action, and I purchased a townhome for less than $10,000 in the same subdivision, just a short drive from Aziz's house. It had three bedrooms upstairs and a basement. I saw my house as a quick investment while my brother had already made up his mind to stay in Canada.

In June of 1975, I sold my townhome for $22,000, made over $10,000 in profit, went to Pakistan and splurged all the money.

I returned to Canada broke, but this experience helped me to realize that I did not want to live in Pakistan. Since the Ahmadis were declared "non-Muslims" in 1974 in Pakistan, I felt like a stranger in my own homeland. A year later, I became a Canadian citizen and was well on my way to making more money and to settling in Canada.

Looking back, it was all small money compared to today, but my perspective and life experience was limited, and I felt like I was making it big. We moved to Clearview, another new subdivision in Edmonton. I had a good job and a newer car, a white Monte Carlo with red interior. Life was pleasant.

I started with only $30 in my pocket when I first landed in Canada, and within a few years, I was enjoying a solid, lower middle-class existence with a comfortable home and two kids.

I am grateful and thankful to my brother, sisters, wife, sister-in-law, relatives, and friends in Canada for helping us in our time of need. The whole process would have been much harder without them.

Pakistan began to fade from my memory.

One interesting side story about Canada: in our early days in Edmonton, in the late 1970s, Bushra worked as a part-time dishwasher at the luxurious new Four Seasons Hotel

(now called the Sutton Place Hotel). The hotel, which was located right in the heart of downtown Edmonton and next to the Edmonton City Centre Mall, was easy for her to walk to at that time.

This was hard work for her as she had to stand and run dishwashers for a long period of time. Sometimes, her managers were mean to her and the other immigrant women who worked at the hotel. Years later, I took Bushra and my family to Edmonton and rented the presidential suite at the same hotel.

I asked Bushra, "How does it feel now?"

She just smiled.

Chapter 6

Clueless Oil-and-Gas Wildcatter

With all the experience I gained in the late 70s driving a taxi, selling pots and pans door-to-door, cutting meat, selling used cars, being a security guard, working for the government, and assorted other tasks, I was ready to take on the world. But was the world ready for me?

On a bright summer day in 1979, I received a phone call from Aziz. He was in Denver meeting the owners of a company that sold franchises for self-watering planters. Aziz had invested in this franchise after taking an early retirement from his job at Schlumberger, but his new venture was failing miserably. He had dozens of unsold planters sitting in his home backyard with no buyers.

Aziz was desperate and wanted to find a way out. In the Denver newspaper, he stumbled across an advertisement seeking buyers for oil and gas wells in the Chanute, Kansas area. Aziz was anxious and wanted to get back into the oil and gas industry.

At about the same time, in Canada, investors in Calgary and Vancouver were buying oil and gas wells and leases in Eastern Kansas. Oil as a commodity was very hot in

1979. The Iranian hostage crisis was at its prime, and the impending US elections garnered much attention. People wanted to buy oil well production and leases, drill wells and make fast money.

In 1979, penny-stock companies sprang up in Vancouver with initial investments of around one to five million dollars. They were focused on investing in Kansas.

Penny stocks are common shares of small public companies that trade at low prices per share. In this case, they raised money from investors to purchase oil and gas wells and producing leases. If the deals became successful, they would make money, boost their stock prices and acquire additional investors.

With my direct sales experience, Aziz couldn't have called a better person than me, so he asked me if I could go to Chanute, a small town in East Kansas, in an effort to learn the ins and outs of buying established oil and gas wells, and how to obtain new oil leases from land and mineral owners. The market for this business was blossoming, and there were many brokers ready to buy in Canada. I just had to learn the details of the business from the ground up.

Excitement overtook my thoughts, and I promptly said yes to this new opportunity.

Aziz gave me the phone number of the cold lead that he saw in the newspaper. He felt that this was an opportunity that we could pursue jointly, and we could share equal profits, though we had to act fast. I was a good salesman and I knew the hardest part: door-to-door sales. Moreover, I was adept at making cold calls and had gained experience selling pots and pans in Edmonton.

When Aziz called me, I told him a big yes, I was interested, and I called the Kansas phone number to inquire about the oil deal for sale. I also told my brother that I would go to Kansas to see to it myself. I had no experience in oil leases or in oil and gas wells production, but I was ready to try anything to better my life. After all, I had no experience when I started selling pots and pans, and no experience as a taxi driver, so what could be so hard about this? I took a three-week vacation from my job in Edmonton and got ready for my next adventure.

Leaving a pleasant summer in Edmonton, I arrived in Chanute, Kansas, in June of 1979. Chanute was in the middle of the flat plains, a stark contrast to the Canadian topography to which I had become accustomed. This was my first entry ever into the United States of America, one that would shape my life forever.

I rented a room in a small motel owned by an Indian family and soon realized I was in a town filled with folks who were mostly farmers and cattle ranchers.

I started driving around the small town and was impressed by a stately courthouse, and the centuries-old buildings that stood in the middle of a major town. A four-way stop loudly proclaimed that this was the center and hub of the town. Large lush green lawns surrounded the elegant courthouse.

While driving around Chanute, I noticed an oilfield shop. My curiosity led me to stop and stroll inside. The shop was owned by Jack Phillis, a middle-aged, talkative man who sold used oilfield equipment. He cursed a lot, and he was a popular local oilfield man. Across the street from his shop was a busy gas station where I met Adam, one of the most enterprising, happy, and smart workers I had met in my life to that point.

His left hand had been amputated, but with just one hand, Adam was faster than anyone I had ever seen: pumping gas in trucks and checking oil, fluids, and tire pressure, and doing so many tasks proficiently. During my time in Chanute, he gave me many leads to farmers in the area, and I always marveled at the fact that he was always happy, enterprising, and hard-working.

Chanute was full of landowners who were friendly, laid-back farmers. They were mostly faithful Christians who spent a good part of their Sundays in churches. Most locals were polite, gentle, and well-mannered. They waved at you as you passed by and behaved well on the roads, compared to some of the Canadians who were rude and would blast their horns. In general, Canadian drivers at the time acted quite frustrated and angry. This was not the case in Chanute.

The world outside Chanute was in the midst of the Iranian hostage crisis. Fifty-two American diplomats and citizens were held hostage for 444 days from November 4, 1979, to January 20, 1981. The diplomatic standoff between Iran and the United States was the main topic of conversation. As an oil-producing area, Chanute and the surrounding oilfield cities were being thrust into center stage. The crisis rocked the price of oil and caused a scarcity at the gas pumps. At this point, the American government was looking at home to produce more oil, so they could be self-reliant.

When I began approaching landowners, they were quite curious. "Where are you from?" they would ask me. "I am from Canada," I would say. They wouldn't believe me at first and probe further.

"Is that where you are really from?" I would then reply that I was originally from Pakistan. On more than one

occasion, I heard landowners ask their wives: "Honey, which state is that?" In 1970s America, very few people knew where Pakistan was, and some people may have thought that I was a rich Iranian spy trying to buy up all their land.

Little towns like Iola, Humboldt, and Piola, close to Chanute, were insular, deeply religious and everyone knew one another. People devoted their lives to growing crops and raising cattle, and they kept their business dealings close to the community. Many disliked my presence, as I looked very foreign with my cowboy hat, moustache, and weird accent.

My goal was to lease their land and sell it to Canadian investors. Our common bond was what lay beneath the earth: oil. I needed the land, they needed money, and a simple transaction would bring prosperity for both of us.

In this flat, barren land, I could stand in one place and keep gazing at the plains for hours. As I drove through the countryside, every mile or two, I saw a barn or a ranch. Landowners had nice one-story homes on their properties and used modern farming techniques. They owned big combines for their large tracts of land; all of this was new to me.

With no time to waste, I hit the ground running. I was ready to make my first buck yet lacked any strategy. At first, I made things up as I went from farmer to farmer.

Just three days after my arrival in Chanute, I began knocking on landowners' doors to find out if they were interested in leasing their land, so we could drill it and try to produce oil. Many had suspicious looks on their faces, yet they were warm and friendly.

Here I was, a brown guy in a sea of whiteness, in a town that rarely had the opportunity to mingle with people from other races. After an initial look, most landowners would ask. "Are you Iranian?" I told them I was not Iranian, and they would ask again: "What is Pakistani?" I had to explain to them the difference between Pakistan and Iran; none of them had a clue about it.

One way to build trust was to try to blend in by imitating the way they dressed. I went to the local Walmart and purchased a pair of blue denim jeans, a pair of cowboy boots, and a couple of blue and white checkered shirts. I wanted to hide my identity, blend in, and try my best not to be considered an Iranian.

I immersed myself into the culture of the people of Chanute. I knew I couldn't be white, and I would not secure oil leases if I appeared Iranian, so my next best bet was to look Hispanic.

One day, while pumping gas in my car, a Mexican national asked me a question in Spanish and I replied, "I don't

understand what you are saying. I don't know Spanish." He started laughing and said, "You are lying! You look like one of us. So, why are you afraid of speaking Spanish?"

I drove a small yellow Ford Pinto car and began traveling around the county roads to meet with landowners. I would patiently wait outside their homes, scan the area, and make sure there were no dogs around. Then, I would knock on the door, gently praying that someone would greet me. If I was lucky, someone would answer the door. With my appearance and accent, I had to earn trust.

"What brings you here to our town?" they always asked.

I would respond that I was from an oil company, and I sometimes said that I was with Al Fazal Oil and Gas Company. Al Fazal was the flagship newspaper of the Ahmadiyya Community (AMI), and we decided to use it as a namesake for our first company, honoring the roots of our faith.

However, for the Kansas locals, the name Al Fazal reminded them of the Iranian hostage situation. The landowners could not pronounce the company's name, and it sounded suspicious. This became an early lesson for us, and I quickly created a simple and easy-to-use name that the locals could understand. The new name of our company was "Petro

America," as it lifted the words straight from Petro Canada, Canada's largest petroleum company at that time. We were lucky that the name Petro America was available in Kansas.

A few weeks into my new adventure, I started noticing the sweet smell of success.

Out of five farmers I met, at least one or two started showing interest in leasing their land to me. This led to a chance meeting with Leo Atkins, a heavy-built man in his mid-sixties and a well-respected local landowner. Leo lived on a farm near Iola, Kansas. He and I developed a trusting relationship right from the beginning, and he was a gracious man. He took me into his home, introduced me to his lovely wife and leased his land to me.

He also introduced me to other landowners in the area as "Jonas," as it was an easy name for him to pronounce rather than my real first name, Younas. At that point, if it was going to make me money, he could have called me Edna and it would have been just fine with me.

Leo was the first local landowner to give me a leg up in the oil and gas business. He taught me the best way to talk to other local farmers, gave me insights into their lives, taught me persuasion techniques to win them over and provided tips on being self-confident. His mentorship was a priceless asset to the future of my business, and I realized then how important

it was to build strong connections in business. I became more self-assured and realized that I could work with all kinds of people, even those who were vastly different than me. I realized that most people simply want to find common connections, and I could provide that link.

Most Kansas farmers were easy-going and kindhearted folks. There were several Christian preachers among them, but they never discriminated against me for being a Muslim. In fact, at that time in the late 1970s and early 1980s, no one hardly knew anything about Islam at all in Kansas. Most landowners would think I was an Iranian. "You guys are richer than me so what are you here for?" they would ask. But I kept working hard and learning how to assimilate and relate to the people of Kansas to gain trust and build business relationships.

Leo would invite me to meals at his home, and he and his wife would hold my hands and say grace before each meal. I found this to be a very good habit as I had never experienced that kind of joint goodwill before the start of each meal in my life. Sometimes, I drove with him in his truck to other farmer's houses where he would introduce me to local farmers.

Leo became a solid, trustworthy referral source, a good friend, and I used his good name in dealing with other landowners.

I became adept in my negotiations with landowners; if things did not work out in my first meetings, I would return a couple of days later and follow up. While I was persistent and persuasive, I rarely used pressure tactics to obtain an oil lease.

"This young man is pretty good," Leo would say, and this was the best reference I could get at that time. By now, the locals knew my yellow Pinto car, and when they saw it parked outside their homes, they would say, "The lease hound is around!" I took that as a compliment. I was consistent and persistent.

As the seasons changed, I started liking Kansas more. I secured several leases from local landowners in the first few weeks, and they were quickly picked up by the Canadian investors. This process gradually increased my confidence.

By now, I not only knew the details about oil & gas leases, but I also learned how to read oil and gas maps and calculate prices, and I could answer most of the general questions landowners had. I sometimes pretended to know things that I did not know yet, something I had a lot of experience in from my days working various jobs in Edmonton.

I soon came to realize that I needed to take the next step.

For me, this step was to learn and master the work of a petroleum landman, so I could have intelligent conversations about oil and gas wells, land leasing, carving royalties, finding oil, and so forth. I would sit in my room, create hypothetical situations, do a lot of mental calculations, and talk it over to myself so that I was adequately prepared to provide a good logical response to landowners who were interested in leasing their land to me. This was really hard work as I had to learn it all very quickly on the job site, but I was determined and dedicated to this work. It excited me, and I felt that I was good at it.

My hard work and curiosity helped me gain a lot of knowledge about the oilfield industry in a very short time. I vigilantly scouted the area for landowners, promptly introduced myself, and tested the temperament of each individual. Usually, I would throw in a referral to secure my first appointments with new landowners, and the excitement would begin.

To make them feel at ease, I would begin with small talk, but quickly, the conversations turned to leasing their land. I always carried the contract papers, and in those days, we used carbon paper, so I could keep copies of the signed contract. If they agreed, I would secure their signatures on the

lease contract and give them a bank draft that they could cash within 30 to 60 days.

After finalizing a land lease, I would contact Aziz who was living in Calgary, and he would try to sell these new oil leases to Canadian investors at a higher price.

The way that we would earn a profit from this business was pretty simple. Let's say I secured a lease from a farmer at $10 per acre. I would give him a draft promising that he would get this money in 30 to 60 days, and we would then sell the same lease to a Canadian investor at $50 per acre. We would keep $40 as compensation; this included compensation for all that I did: the finder's fee, negotiating the contract, and closing the deal. We made good money as none of our investors ever wanted to do the job I was doing, as this would require copious amounts of time and lengthy trips to Kansas.

As time passed, we asked our Canadian investors for an additional three-percent royalty from the sale of oil, as they planned to drill wells and produce oil and gas from the wells on the leased lands. This was the icing on the cake to our deals, as it would make us consistent money when wells were drilled.

In truth, the majority of our Canadian investors did not drill on the land they leased. Their business was all a numbers game. Their investments in penny stocks went up fast, and they had recouped their money quickly; therefore,

they did not care about the land they had leased. The leases were secured for no more than three years, and most would expire. These investors leased these lands to hype their stocks to expand their portfolio, touting that they owned oil and gas leases in the United States. This was in hopes that they would continue to secure more funding from stockholders and other investors and eventually drill oil wells on such leases.

We saw the opportunity that arose, and we made good profits from it, and I realized I was in the right place at the right time.

By this time, my passion for this business had grown considerably, and I wanted more.

Within a year, I realized that I needed to purchase producing oil and gas wells, since leasing land alone did not yield any long-term revenue, and there was no steady monthly cash flow. The land leasing business was good and quick, but buying producing oil wells and drilling new wells was much more lucrative as it would create continuous monthly revenue.

I started looking earnestly into buying oil wells; I bought Kansas oil field maps from the Kansas Geological Society in Wichita, and I began to purchase established oil wells directly from landowners or from other local oil companies. I steadily began to see the fruits of my labor, and it excited me.

During this time, I still had my family living back in Canada whom I visited once a month. I would work three weeks in Kansas, and I would spend one week in Canada with Bushra and the kids.

Bushra was supportive of my move to Kansas, but she did not want to leave Canada. She had arranged for our Pakistani neighbors, the Trimizi family, to keep an eye on our family when she was at work. The Trimizis were kind and nice neighbors. They had three daughters and three sons, and their eldest daughter was a teenager who would stay at our home with Bushra while I was not there.

Meanwhile, back in Kansas, I was trying to figure out how I was going to generate a sustainable, continuous income. This was a perennial question I had in the early days of business. As the volume of my business grew, I became selective and looked at the land that yielded long-term income and value. I hired local geologists and engineers who could show me structure maps where we could better see where oil was trapped beneath the surface. With that ability, I was able to select leases that had a higher production probability. Even with the addition of these maps, I still knew very little about what lay beneath the land, and each lease was a gamble.

Sometimes, I would go on wild goose chases and take big risks. There were times I would lease land in bulk. If

somebody had 5,000 acres and was trying to parcel out different areas at $20 or $40 per acre, I would offer them a flat price, for example, $15 per acre and lease it all.

In my first year, I did exceedingly well, securing and selling lots of these oil lease packages. My income was several times more than what I was making in Edmonton. And, I did not have to put up with drunk taxi-riders or cut bloody meat.

The landowners in Chanute and other places in East Kansas were not aware of their land leasing value, and that was one of my advantages. No one had yet started knocking on their doors offering them more money for leasing their land. Most farmers had bank loans, and since the land was not being used, they figured why not lease it and make some money? Investors who were the buyers rarely cared if there was any oil there or not.

Most landowners' assets were tied to their land, yet they had very little liquid cash, often barely making ends meet. The oil leases gave them a much-needed supplemental income. They leased land in hopes of finding oil, which improved their daily cash flow and made them able to take care of their immediate needs. As an added cash bonus, if the oil wells were drilled and produced, they would get a royalty of at least 12.5% from all oil and gas sales.

The more I saw their way of life, the more I drew parallels to what was happening back in Pakistan with my father's lands. My father had lots of valuable land but little cash flow and was barely scraping by. This parallel encouraged me to continue to work hard and grow my oil & gas business.

Over time, I strengthened my relationships with landowners and established my own connections with various investors in Canada and America. The landowners were generous with their time, and if I faced delays in paying for their leases, they were kind enough to give me more time. I rarely dealt with any unpleasant farmers, and if things did not work out, we would drop the lease by cancelling the deal altogether. I found this to be an integral part of my business strategy as it continued to increase my credibility.

For me, maintaining a good relationship with landowners was important, as they were a close-knit community, and having a good reputation was critical.

As I engaged in conversations with them, I was straightforward. "This young man speaks logic; he says what makes sense," they said.

With no business debt or any outstanding loans, I started my business with money that belonged to investors. I incurred little personal costs but took risks betting my future

and my investors' prospects on a highly volatile commodity. My key stakeholders, the landowner and the investor, had a vested interest in making money. I was the facilitator who negotiated mutually beneficial deals with my primary stakeholders.

As I continued to purchase more oil leases, Petro America started making profits.

We started this business with frugality as a core concept, since I had saved a meager amount of money from my work back in Edmonton. There were disappointing days when, for one reason or another, someone would be ready to sign a lease but would change their mind at the last minute. Sometimes, one family member would oppose a deal, and the remaining family members would follow suit.

Yet, I persevered because I knew that the oil and gas industry was a viable business, and if somebody else could do it, I could do it as well. After all, this was much better than driving a taxi or selling pots and pans or sitting mindlessly watching pressure gauges in the control room of a power plant in Edmonton.

As the months passed by, I learned that in order to increase my profit margins, expense and cost control was critical. When I entered into deals, I paid attention to the cost of doing business over anything else. My business philosophy

centered on frugality and a single-minded focus to avoid unnecessary costs and waste. I did not take spending lightly. Some people may call it being cheap, but I believe it to be smart. I've proven day in and day out that I could survive in the oil and gas business even if the oil price is at $8 a barrel. The oil and gas business is feast or famine, and I have learned that you can still feast heartily while vigilantly preparing for the famine.

Chapter 7

First Oil Well Production

As business started picking up, I rented a large old home in Chanute. It was a massive three-story Victorian-style home built in the 1930s. There was a separate single-story structure between the garage and the main side entrance, and this became Petro America's first office. We also launched American Drilling from here when we began drilling for oil.

Business was picking up, and we hired a young woman as a receptionist and bookkeeper. Her name was Yolanda, and her brother, Brian, became our second employee. Brian worked as a roughneck, an oilfield worker. They were our first local employees. We launched Petro America without any long-term written business plan. My intense focus was on building adequate cash flow to keep the business going. My brother would visit me in Chanute once a month to see the business stabilizing and growing.

I purchased my first oil lease, well included, called the Calvin lease, close to the town of Humboldt in Allen County, Kansas. A previous oil company owner had drilled a few oil wells, but they gave up, went broke, and left all the equipment at the wells' sites. I introduced myself to the

landowner and asked him if I could lease his land along with the oil wells. The farmer willingly agreed because he needed the money and thought there would be little to no chance of extracting oil from this field by him.

Little did he know.

I negotiated hard and paid him with little cash. This was my first deal of this nature, and it excited me. I devoted a lot of my time in the oilfield. I hired a local experienced pumper, cleared the ground, pulled wells, restored the least dilapidated oil wells on the tract and became eager to smell oil for the first time.

After getting the oil wells back online, I eagerly kept my ear close to the gun barrel and stock tanks and intensely listened to the noise of the pressure in the tanks where the fluid flowed in from the pumping wells. As the oil, gas and water gushed with the well's pressure, I would hear the "whoosh" sound and felt very happy.

My first day of oil well production from this lease yielded around five barrels. That was a good day for me, as I had hardly any money invested into this first oil production venture. I sold the oil being produced to the Koch Oil Company that owned a refinery in the area. I was then able to gradually repair most of the oil wells, and they started yielding

more oil. This became a profitable lease that I continued to own for some time.

Every day, I checked how many barrels of oil were produced, and then I would sell the oil every time the stock tank would get full. My primary focus became finding leases with oil wells already established.

Aziz and I had been in the oil business together for about a year now, and we were equal partners. I began to pick up my own contacts and investors, and Aziz did the same. It became apparent that our business goals were quite different.

Aziz was more interested in developing an oil business using investments from the public by making private companies into public companies. Conversely, I wanted to operate and run the oil wells business as a private firm and exercise control over my businesses. I wanted to implement my own business philosophy and maintain my own independence.

We parted ways after a year.

If one is starting a business today, I highly recommend you have a good business plan and learn all about financing from the beginning. If I had a business plan at the time, I would have bought more oil production and purchased less oil leases at the very start. However, often you do not

know until you have gone through the experience, for as they say, "hindsight is 20/20."

During this time, I was going back and forth to Edmonton every month, and I was missing the family life. Bushra did not like Chanute. She thought it was too small and rural, and it was difficult to raise a family there. She loved living in Edmonton and did not want to move to America. She tried moving to Chanute in the summer of 1981 with our two kids but was terribly miserable.

In 1982 I left Chanute and moved my operations to Wichita, where I launched my first private company, Pioneer Exploration. The office was in a tiny, leased space on the main road, Broadway, near downtown Wichita. When I chose the name Pioneer, I did not see any significance; however, reflecting back, perhaps it was because I was the "pioneer" of my family, one of the first to come to America, live in Kansas in 1979 and pave a new way in the USA.

One of my first employees in Wichita was a man named Don Smith. He served many roles including being geologist, assistant, and one-man public relations department. Don was over seven-feet tall and heavy-set; you could not miss him. Even though his height and weight were formidable, he was a gentle giant. After graduating from Kansas University as a geologist, he worked for an oil firm that went

belly up, and this led him to join me. A brilliant young geologist, Don helped me acquire several oil wells in 1983 in Kansas, Texas, Oklahoma, and other states.

We worked together for a few years, and he proved to be an adept analyst who helped me identify the hidden values of oil properties. Together, we worked on creating multiple bid packages to buy oil wells from Sun Exploration, Chevron, Exxon, Texaco, and Mobil. We would assess the value of the bid packages and submit bids to companies. If we felt the overall deal was good, we would give a down payment and go check the wells and fields. We would pay the rest once the deal was finalized. I started obtaining loans from a local bank to buy the oil wells.

An inspiring event occurred in my life in 1983, in Wichita, Kansas, which played an important role in developing my spirituality. I had a deadline on one of my oil deals with Texaco where I was required to submit a deposit of $300,000 to secure the purchase of several oil well assets in Kansas. I did not have the money, and I was trying hard to get it from all possible sources. I had run an ad in the local newspaper to search for investors who were willing to invest with me in this oil venture. The last weekend before the deadline due date, I had given up hope of completing this particular oil deal when I received a phone call from a

gentleman who wanted to invest in that oil deal after he asked few questions from me. The next day, he came to my office and met me.

The man was an older gentleman in his late 60s. He was well dressed in a black suit. He did not seem to have much knowledge of the oil and gas business.

I had a meeting with him and discussed the current oil deal, due date, my future projects, and I briefed him about the deal, about myself and about my company. He was quite impressed with me and with my confidence. He came back later that day and delivered me a cashier's check for $300k for the Texaco deal to go ahead and purchase it.

With that, I was able to complete the deal with Texaco.

That investment turned out to be a very good deal. I tried to contact that gentleman; I sent him his share of checks a few months later, but none were ever cashed. I tried hard to reach out to him but was not able to locate him. It was as if the person never existed. It appeared as if an angel had come to help me in my time of need. I believe that God has always been with me in my life, brought me this far, and will not abandon me in a time of need.

During my prime years, I started working from home at the crack of dawn. On most days, I was in the office before seven in the morning, worked late hours every day and

worked six days a week. I liked the long daylight hours, as I worked very late into the day. My mornings began with conversations with all the oilfield pumpers in the different fields, and I would scrutinize production reports from the previous night and month to date. Then, I checked all costs and invoices to make sure we were not being overcharged. I was involved in every facet of my business.

Just outside the front door of my office in Wichita was a Wendy's restaurant. For three years, I ate most of my lunches and dinners there. People knew that if I was not in my office, I could easily be found at Wendy's, munching on a burger, fries, and a Frosty, as that was my favorite treat.

I was rapidly becoming American.

During weekends, I would travel to the oilfields, meet pumpers at different sites and discuss ways to cut costs. This helped enhance the efficiency of our oil wells production and reduce waste. For example, if there was high electricity consumption at a particular oilfield, I would immediately ask the pumper to act to reduce it.

In 1984/85, when oil prices fell to $8 a barrel, I personally started going to the fields a lot more on a daily basis. I went to all the oil well sites, met my pumpers and engaged in frank conversations with them. I told them that I had to reduce their pay, as the oil market was plummeting, but

I never wanted to let them go. I learned that a good pumper and loyal oilfield workers were huge assets for an oil production company. They have their eyes and ears on the ground, and if you respect their expertise, they will give you several quality solutions to your problems and add more profit to your bottom line.

My straightforward approach and candid conversations earned me their trust and respect. Together, we watched all of our costs, would lay low until the next boom and we rose as a team when the oil market rebounded.

I was very hands-on in all my oilfield operations, and this persistence led to many successes. I traveled to the fields, learned from my employees, and worked out ways in which we could enhance efficiency. We made money in the fields, and despite many hardships, the business flourished.

Chapter 8

Pushed Against the Wall

In Wichita, I started making friends with a lot of wealthy Indian and Pakistani doctors who were living in and around the area. I also met Tom Borte in a small town in Eastern Kansas; he was a local American. He was in his fifties and was a well-respected person in the area. I knew his son, Don, a handsome young man, and he introduced to me to his father who had connections with local bankers and many well-to-do people in the area.

As our relationship grew, Tom introduced me to Dr. Peter Patel, a prominent surgeon of Indian origin. Dr. Patel and a few other investors showed interest in buying oil and gas wells and wanted me to find oil deals and have me run the oil and gas operations. The arrangement we made was that investors, including Dr. Patel, were to be paid 100% on the oil well deals and would own 90% of the assets before payout. I would own 10% before payout and a 70/30 split after payout. My responsibility was to manage the oil and gas wells and all oilfield operations.

During this time, I purchased several oil and gas production wells and leases. This was a good deal for everyone. My investors were happy and were making good money. It was hard work for me, but I agreed to the deal, and the business was flying until the price of oil suddenly started falling in the mid-eighties.

We started losing money and the investors began to panic. The bank that had loaned them the money started asking questions, and they were looking to me for answers. I had none as the downturn was due to a sudden drop in oil prices. The drop was not my fault. The overall oil market crashed, and oil prices went down below ten dollars per barrel.

Dr. Patel and his group of investors were upset, angry and blamed me for the losses of their multimillion dollars of their investments with me. I had nothing to do with the unpredictable, cyclical energy market, but not having any experience in the oil industry, they did not understand the roller coaster ride we call the oil business.

As prices slid further, they became angrier, contacted my employees and tried to pit them against me. Unfortunately, they were somewhat successful. In very short order, they hired a local high-powered attorney in Wichita and filed a lawsuit against me.

This was nerve-wracking; even the thought of court proceedings made me nauseous. I pleaded with my investors several times to stop the proceedings, but they did not listen. I had never seen a court in the United States before and had never stood trial for anything. I wanted to come to some sort of resolution and settlement to buy peace with them since this was a very daunting situation for me. My back was against the wall, and I had to find a solution.

"Younas, you have no choice. All your employees are with me, and you are going to be punished and fined by the court," Dr. Patel aggressively told me. I had no way of really knowing whether or not this was true, but I was afraid and quite concerned.

He said there was only one option: I take full ownership of all of the oil and gas wells and return all of their investments back to them. Then we would talk to our bank to pay off the loans and find a solution. No matter what, he wanted to get out of the oil wells deal altogether.

I told him that I would assign all my interest to them, so they would just leave me alone. But he was a doctor, not an oil man, and he did not want to be involved in anything that was losing money, especially one he knew nothing about. Tom Borte grew worried as well; however, he was also one of the directors of a local bank. He was aware that neither he, nor

any of the other investors, could run the oil wells, but they had the financial expertise I lacked. He advised me to take a loan from the bank and buy out all ownership from each investor.

Since all their loans were secured by the local bank, I told them that I would assume all the loans and interest, including all past due payments. I also gave a personal guarantee (which, even to this day, I do not like to give) to the bank stating that I would operate the oil wells and pay all their assumed debt with monthly installments. The bank wanted to avoid bankruptcy at all costs and coaxed the investors to transfer their loans in my name. The investors agreed to this proposition. The loans now became my responsibility; however, they were still on the hook in case I did not perform since the bank did not release them, a precaution taken in case my efforts failed. The lawsuit was dismissed, and Dr. Patel was satisfied. Overall, Dr. Patel was a good, decent man, but fear drove him to make harsh decisions in those days. My best wishes and prayers are with Dr. Patel and to all my investors.

Now I had to deliver results and get all the money back to the bank.

I was taking my first ride on what people in the industry call "the famous oil and gas roller coaster." But those of us who have chosen it as a career should be used to it by now. There's an oft-quoted line from the movie *Parenthood*

where the 80-year-old grandma talks about whether it's better in life to ride a merry-go-round or a roller coaster. She preferred the roller coaster because, as she said, "It was just so interesting to me that a ride could make me so frightened, so scared, so sick, so excited, and so thrilled all at the same time." The merry-go-round, she said, just went round and round. No excitement, no thrill. That, my friends, is the oil and gas business in a nutshell.

So, I went back to the drawing board. As prices continued to slide, I worked smarter, harder, and started managing oil wells production much more diligently. Fortunately, a few months later, oil prices rebounded, and I was in a position to pay back the loan and interest owed to the bank with no issues.

Another crisis averted.

This incident taught me two important lessons in my business life. The first was that I had learned how to perform well in the face of adversity, and the second, and the most important realization, was that short-term thinking rarely yielded results in the long run. My investors wanted to make a quick profit and they were thinking short-term. As oil prices fell, they started panicking and placed blame on me. They forgot that external factors, which were totally out of anybody's control, had caused the oil market to crash.

This incident was yet another turning point in my life. I was faced with a situation that shook me to the core, yet I succeeded in finding a solution that led to great success.

I soon had full control and ownership of all of their oil wells and properties, and as oil prices surged, I made a substantial amount of money, paid back the loans and interest, and the bank was so pleased that they were willing to loan me more money. I gave the bank the required trust and the business acumen to take on a challenge boldly and run a complex, highly volatile oil business. I also had a lot of patience and knew that with a resilient mind I could accomplish anything.

I now felt that I could confidently call myself an oilman. Suddenly, situations that used to baffle me, empowered me to make bolder business deals. Despite the vast fluctuations in the oil and gas business, I realized that with consistency, patience, and strategic risk taking, I could achieve more in my business.

When I began my work with the investors in Kansas, I would own 10% and do all the work while they owned 90%. Now, a few months later, I had 100% ownership, I had paid back all the debt to the bank, and I never looked back.

That deal helped me make my first million dollars, but I wanted much more than just this, having had my first taste of the oil and gas business.

In 1982, Aziz and I went to see an oilman who was also a local preacher in Blackwell, Oklahoma. As we were discussing a deal with him in his living room, I noticed a big blue package from an oil company called Sun Production and Exploration sitting on a table in front of him. As the conversation continued, he pointed it out to us and casually said that a Dallas company kept sending these to him and he just never opened them. I offered to take that package and he happily gave it to me. We thanked him and took it with us.

Once we got inside our car, I eagerly opened it and saw there were several oil and gas properties for sale from this company. The package provided detailed information about the oil wells properties for sale at different locations.

We were thrilled with this find and the next day, I registered with Sun Exploration and started making bids, and I'm sure Aziz did the same. We both were quite competitive. Most of those oil deals turned out to be quite lucrative for me.

In the early 80s, I began traveling to Vancouver and Calgary and other cities to find more investors interested in buying oil and gas leases and production from me. During one of those trips, I made friends with a broker who used to work

for an investment company. He introduced me to several individuals who owned stocks in various companies and were willing to trade their stocks for oil and gas acreage. I made good money on those deals as the stock market started yielding quicker and higher returns for me in a very short time. This gave me the cash flow to strengthen my oil and gas business operations.

Here I was, selling oil leases in Kansas to potential investors who transferred their stocks to me in the hopes that they would one day make money by drilling wells in oil leases. The deals were lucrative, but I could not continue it for long since it involved a lot of travel, and I had become fairly established in my business. I look back and see that every time I took a chance with a new opportunity, it helped me better understand the value of risk-taking and led me to greater success.

Throughout my career, I never showed an interest in taking any of my companies' public, even though I was offered many such deals. I was not interested in relinquishing my independence and control.

When I lost a deal or had other disappointments, I coached myself to overcome stress. I would take time to pause and reflect on what had happened. I would not dwell on it, rather, I would work on my deficiencies and then choose to

let it go. This process may have taken some time, but I always tried to look forward, not backwards. You cannot change the past, you cannot predict the future, so it's best to stay in the present.

I started Pioneer in 1983, and that transformed the lives of my entire family and provided jobs to many. Instead of waiting for an opportunity to come to me, I went into action, believing that God gives us opportunities and it is important that we take them. If we do not, they will naturally vanish. When opportunity knocks, take it and run with it, as it is truly a gift from God.

As soon as I got an idea that I thought would work, I moved forward. All I thought was, "Let's see what happens." When my brother made the call to me after seeing the advertisement in the paper, I just went for it in the summer of 1979, and it changed not only my life, but the lives of all my family at large and many others. All I said was, "Yes, I will do it."

When you start your life with nothing in a small, poor village halfway around the world, it is not necessarily greed that drives you, but rather, a passion for making a better life not only for your family, but for others who join you on your journey.

In business, I did not have any mentors and did not belong actively to any business networks. I hardly read any self-help books. Occasionally, I would listen to Zig Ziglar, a salesman and motivational speaker, but I did not follow anyone seriously. Self-motivation is one of my key assets that has served me well in almost all of my dealings.

Recently, my granddaughter asked me: "Papa, you have almost everything you ever wanted. Why aren't you retiring?" I told her that my passion does not fade, even as I grow older. I explained that the human mind should be kept busy and occupied to keep it healthy. One needs to continue to pursue their passion and stay engaged, especially as they begin to age. I could easily go and spend my time playing golf or doing something else the rest of my life, but that's something I am not interested in. I'd rather continue to put my efforts into my YBC Foundation (Younas and Bushra Chaudhary Foundation also known as YBC Foundation) and my other businesses. I believe self-guidance, keeping your mind busy, contentment, seeking inner-happiness and consistency are all quite important, regardless of age.

If you like to take risks and challenges, there is no business better than the oil and gas industry. It is fast-paced and exciting, and while it has its fair share of stress (remember the roller coaster comparison from earlier), overall it is quite

rewarding. High risks will yield high rewards and sometimes colossal failures. But experience, failure and instinct will guide you on how to move forward the best way in any business venture.

I have never filed for bankruptcy. I am humbled and proud of this accomplishment. Many oil and gas companies had to shut their doors when oil prices fell. Early on I knew the dangers of fluctuating oil prices and chose to start investing in real estate as it offered a hedge against volatile oil prices and provided me long-term security.

In addition, I found patience to be a virtue for me. I have held on too many oil and gas wells that I've accumulated over the last several decades in order to continue to provide income. Over the years, I developed the habit of hoarding oil and gas leases in multiple states and not selling my assets.

I've disliked the idea of partnering with investors or investment companies in structuring a deal, especially after I had issues in the 1980s with the investors in Kansas.

Over the years, I've had multiple offers from equity companies to buy out part of my business, but I always declined the offers. The biggest disadvantage is that you lose your independence and you start working for them rather than yourself. Without the investors seeing the bigger picture, the probability of failure in these dealings is high. I chose to keep

my ownership in my businesses and maintain sole control of my businesses. I stayed firm and retained my independence.

Throughout my business life, I've learned that one has to make mistakes to learn and move on. You cannot learn this from reading a book (although I'm happy you are reading mine). You must experience it on your own. No one can tell you how to take risks or which risks to take. Mistakes are worth making, and you certainly cannot fully flourish until you have hit the bottom a few times on your own dime.

Most of my good decisions in business came when I was under pressure, against the wall and many of my greatest successes came after huge failures.

My strong consistent work ethic has helped me succeed and if my employees worked ten hours a day, I would work eleven. I always lead by example. In dealing with employees, I tend to respond immediately and have always been quite conservative in my dealings. If I can impart anything, I have a few simple tips below which I believe are important for being successful in any business. They worked for me, and I sincerely believe they will work for you:

- Dream big, work hard, be consistent.
- Show dedication and never look back.
- Diversify your portfolio in core and non-core areas.

- Obey the laws of the land.
- Keep good relationships with lenders.
- Be confident, be fearless.
- Monitor costs and be solution-driven.
- Focus on efficiency, be hands-on and move fast.
- Lead by example and collaborate without ego.
- Take calculated risks in life and in business.
- Be passionate.

Chapter 9

My Father Jailed for Being an Ahmadi Muslim

While things were going very well for me in the United States, a world away, my father was about to face something that shook our entire family to its very core.

It was past midnight on a slightly chilly night in the early fall of 1984. My father was sleeping peacefully in his house in Farid Town, Sahiwal. At around 2 a.m., he heard a knock on the door, and a little later, the sound of a vehicle, possibly a police jeep, and the hard thump of people's boots.

He brushed off the noise. It could be the usual sound of the police patrolling town. After all, the country was under martial law.

But the knocks got louder, and the headlights of a jeep shone through the front window. The sound of boots reverberated in all four corners of the house and he had no idea what was happening.

He scrambled out of bed, and right outside his room stood a police constable.

"You are under arrest," the constable said.

"For what?" my father, who was still half-asleep, asked.

"For the murders in the local Sahiwal mosque," the constable said.

"What murder? Where? I have no idea what you are talking about. I never went out of the house," he said.

The constable paused and slowly broke the grim news. My father was one of 11 Ahmadis being arrested on charges of killing two protesters inside the Ahmadi mosque in Sahiwal. He initially suspected that the police were fabricating charges against him so they could get some money out of him. After all, the police knew that his sons were abroad and were sending money to him.

He asked the constable how much he should pay so he would not be arrested. It was common for Pakistani police to issue an arrest warrant, come to your home, take money and then return to the police station saying the suspect was not found.

The constable had a serious look.

"Sir, there is no way I can help you. My senior officers are outside and President Zia-ul-Haq is directly involved in this case. I cannot do anything about this," he said.

Next to his bedroom, my frail 104-year-old grandmother woke up hearing the noise. She was not coherent, as age had caught up to her, but my mother and my younger sister saw what was happening and became hysterical. They

began to cry uncontrollably as the police were explaining the very serious murder charges that he was facing, and he was to be hung for murder. Imagine, having the police come to your home in the middle of the night, being escorted as an innocent man to jail, and leaving your family alone and afraid. These types of occurrences happened more often than we even knew, but we never thought it would happen to our own family.

My father had no choice but to give in. He was carted off and taken to the Sahiwal Central Jail, one of the oldest and most notorious jails in Pakistan. This was the highest security prison that housed the most hardened criminals, and now my father was considered one of them. My father was put into jail just because he was an Ahmadi Muslim. I was baffled to say the least.

A total of 11 people were charged, but the authorities could only find seven of them. My father and the six others were housed in a maximum-security room in the "C" class section of the jail, the lowest class. This area was heavily guarded.

The jail was constantly overflowing. Streaks of *paan* (a mix of betel leaf and areca nut) covered the walls. The concrete floor was bare and dirty covered with urine, sweat, and blood. It had seen some awful incidents. Flies, roaches, and mosquitoes competed for space along with human beings.

My father and the remaining six men spent most of their time praying and catching little bits of sleep whenever they could. They were all deeply afraid because they were told they could be hung to death any time.

"Why am I here? What wrong did I do? I do not even know why I am being held here," my father cried.

I'm sure my father would have thought frequently about the day when he would be hung. He kept true to his faith and prayed hard, asking God to spare his life. The case against him was an obvious fabrication as he had nothing to do with this alleged crime.

According to the authorities, on October 26, 1984, students of a *madrasah* (religious school) came to the mosque and attacked the Ahmadi mosque in Sahiwal just after the morning prayers. The mob became violent and started pouring blue paint to remove the Quranic verses inside the mosque.

As the mob started defacing the holiest parts of the mosque, the local custodian at the mosque, Rana Naeem ud Din Ahmad, fired at the protestors, killing one of them: Qari Bashir Ahmad. The custodian did his duty to protect the Kalama-e-Tayyaba, the most iconic and sacred profession of faith that all Muslims have held dear since the time of the Holy Prophet. The Holy Prophet himself had declared that the

profession of the Kalama-e-Tayyaba was sufficient enough for one to be accepted as a Muslim.

The authorities booked my father in jail, and as he had absolutely no ties to this incident, his only crime was that he was an Ahmadi Muslim, a follower of a minority sect, which the majority Sunni Muslims hated.

Back in Wichita, I received the call from my sister-in-law to inform me of what was happening. I took the first plane out to Pakistan. I wanted to be at my father's side.

As I met my father in jail, my heart almost stopped, as the sight was unbearable. The prison guards brought him to me with shackles all over his body, with chains on his feet, waist, and hands. Just imagine, with shackles and chains tied to my father's body, he was not able to properly stand, walk or sit. My father's helpless dire situation, his grim sad look, blank eyes and the way he was treated has haunted me to this day. He was dressed in jail clothes, and they were treating him like a hardened criminal. He was disheveled. His face was unshaved, and he did not speak much. It was very difficult for me to bear the sight of my father in that condition. Here was the strong patriarch of my family, a proud, hard-working pious man, reduced to a virtual shell of his former self. It was almost too much for me to bear. Thereafter, I quietly wept for days and weeks helplessly.

Trusting that I would be led to do the next right thing, I went into action. My first inclination was to get him out of the C-class prison. One local contact led to another, and after much persuasion with the authorities, we transferred my father from the C-class prison into an A-class facility, so he could have better treatment and amenities. I could now visit him in a semi-private area of the prison, and here, I gave my word to my father that I would do everything possible to get him out of jail as soon as I could.

This incident deeply scared and affected all of our family both mentally and emotionally. The authorities were being cruel to my father simply because he was an Ahmadi. I had deep empathy for the remaining six prisoners who had to endure hardship in the C-class cell and urged the authorities to have them moved to the A-class cell. They told me that if I did that, they would send my father back into the C-class cell. I was helpless but felt deeply for the remaining prisoners.

"Don't try setting any precedents here; this is the only favor that we can do for you," they said. "If you try doing more, we will have your father back in the C-class prison."

Over the next 12 months, my brother and I visited Pakistan multiple times to meet with influential people within the regime to secure the release of our father who had been falsely accused of murder.

The Ahmadis hired prominent attorneys to assist in the prisoners' release, fighting back against the regime in court. As time passed, the inner circle of President Zia realized their tactics were not working as they did not have any proof.

While my father was in jail, my old grandmother, Baygi, felt very lonely and depressed. She stopped eating, and passed away at 105. "Where is Mohammed Ishaque? Where is Mohammed Ishaque?" she would cry and ask me in her weak voice after he was taken to jail. My father was her primary caretaker, and they had become deeply attached to one another.

The authorities even denied my father permission to attend his own mother's burial at Rabwah, a religious and cultural site for Ahmadis in Pakistan. This deeply depressed and saddened my father, as he felt the government was denying him a simple, basic human right to be at the burial of his own mother. He had made all arrangements for her funeral and reserved a burial spot next to my grandfather. The casket was ordered, and he had taken care of all the minute details. He had great respect and affection for his mother. The passing away of my grandmother and her burial without my father's presence was a very depressing, sad and moving experience for me.

I was in Pakistan when my grandmother passed away, so I was fortunate and blessed enough to perform my father's duties to arrange things, travel to Rabwah, attend the funeral, and take care of all last-minute details, just as my father would have done for his beloved mother.

Once again, we could all see and feel at the time that in Pakistan, we were being deeply discriminated against for being Ahmadis. It was as if we were not a part of that country and we did not belong in Pakistan. How could we live in a country as an Ahmadi under a regime that was constantly accusing innocent people of murder and throwing them into jail?

The dictator at that time, Zia, hated Ahmadis and had declared them as heretics.

After spending a year in jail, my father was finally acquitted on October 21, 1985, by the military court. This was due to our ongoing efforts as well as by the Ahmadi community that we took in, convincing the authorities that my father had no role of any kind in the incidents that happened in the mosque.

As we met senior army officials in efforts to have my father released from prison, they would jokingly ask me, "How did you become an Ahmadi? You seem to be a nice, decent guy." It felt as though they were throwing salt on our

wounds, mocking us. My only response to them was that I was born an Ahmadi.

By the mid-1980s, the Ahmadis had to leave their beloved homeland because of such rampant discrimination. Thousands became refugees and re-settled in Europe and the West, rebuilding their lives. I must also say here that the Ahmadi community, as a whole, has done great things and accomplished a lot in the Western world after they were forced out of their own homeland, Pakistan.

I feel that was not good for Pakistan as they were losing a very peaceful, enterprising, and patriotic group of good faithful honest people to the West. I feel bad for it as I love Pakistan as it is my birthplace.

The military tribunal in their sentence in October 1985 did not spare the remaining six Ahmadis who were jailed alongside my father. The court handed down death sentences to Ahmadiyya missionary Mohammad Munir, and Rana Naeem-Uddin Ahmad, the custodian of the Sahiwal mosque. The other four were sentenced to prison for seven years each.

The sentence was sent to General Ghulam Jilani Khan, then Governor of Punjab for ratification. General Jilani felt there was a clear miscarriage of justice as Rana Naeem Sahib was clearly acting in self-defense and none of the others

accused had been at the scene. At the time, General Zia did not relent. He wanted everyone hanged.

My father was the only one who was acquitted and freed from jail.

My father got fed up living his life in Pakistan and had no choice but to leave his beloved birthplace in sadness. After that episode, we immediately moved our parents to Canada. This incident as of this day still brings so much sadness and grief to me and to my family as we all love our birthplace and heritage in Pakistan.

Religious persecution is something that never seems to end, and while it pained me to have my father and mother leave their birthplace, which we all loved, it was the way to continue our lives as peace loving humans. I hope and pray that others who have experienced such persecution find comfort knowing they are not alone. I pray with all my good wishes and prayers for my birthplace Pakistan, which I always loved and where I hold lots of fond memories of my childhood. It was where I grew-up, learned valuable life lessons, and I continue to cherish it even today.

Chapter 10

Love for All; Hatred for None

The Ahmadi Muslims, like other Muslims, observe the Five Pillars of Islam and the Six Articles of Faith. There is absolutely no difference between an Ahmadi Muslim and another Muslim except that we believe that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (PBUH) is the Messiah, whereas others do not.

The Ahmadis are active translators of the Holy Quran and proselytizers for the faith, believing and following the basic tenet: "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed (SAW) is His Messenger."

Yet, we are considered non-Muslims by many Muslims worldwide. We consider Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908) (PBUH), the founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, to be the promised Mahdi and Messiah awaited by the Muslims. This difference has brought about much animosity and dissonance between us and other sects within Islam.

We believe that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (PBUH) came to Qadian, India, to revive and reinstate the glory of Islam. God sent Ahmad (PBUH), much like Jesus (PBUH), to

restore peace in the world, and his presence brought a revival of Islam. He worked hard to remove Islam of fanatical beliefs and practices and focused on Islam's true and essential teachings.

After the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, most of the Ahmadi Muslims moved to Pakistan, which is currently home to the largest number of Ahmadi Muslims worldwide.

Today, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Movement (AMI) is present in over 212 countries worldwide, with international headquarters in London. Ahmadi Muslims have categorically denounced terrorism and bloodshed in Islam since the origin of the movement. A central spiritual leader, known as the Khalifa of Islam, leads us and our fifth and current spiritual head is Mirza Masroor Ahmad who resides in the United Kingdom.

Ahmadis have been victimized and prosecuted by certain Sunni mullahs and other sects of Islam, ever since our faith began in Qadian. The Sunni mullahs blindly believe that after His Holiness, Prophet Mohammed (SAW), there could not be any Messiah unless approved by them.

In 1889, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (PBUH) claimed that he was the "reformer of the 14th century of the Islamic era"

and was the Mahdi and the Promised Messiah, whose advent in the latter days had been predicted by His Holiness Prophet Mohammed (SAW). Ahmad (PBUH) laid the foundation of the Ahmadiyyat Movement, and his claim to be the Messiah aroused bitter opposition among leaders of different faiths.

The *mullahs* [religious clerics] of the Sunni sect in Pakistan could not believe this, and their fanatic ideology led to the constant persecution of Ahmadis in Pakistan. They propagate fear instead of love among each other and toward Almighty God. I believe there is no point in fearing God. To me, God is a happy God, forgiving, kind, and loving to all mankind.

The hatred against Ahmadis grew in strength in Pakistan over the decades. In 1977, the hatred was at its peak when General Zia seized power over the country. He declared martial law, ousting his former mentor and guide, Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, who was democratically elected.

Zia promised that he would declare elections within 90 days, yet he was so consumed by power and arrogance that he kept on prolonging martial law. Moreover, he received quite a bit of financial support from the United

States, as they wanted him to oppose the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

As the years dragged on, Zia became firmly entrenched in his position and started enacting a series of draconian laws. With the help of staunch mullahs and the religious police, he introduced the Hadood Ordinance, which brought back punishments like amputation, flogging, and stoning people to death.

In April 1984, he enacted Ordinance XX that was designed to specifically target Ahmadis and curb their religious freedom. According to the *Rabwah Times*, "Ahmadis were prevented from calling out the *Adhan* [call to prayer], refer to their place of worship as mosques, or use the Islamic salutation "Asalaam-o-Alaikum" The additional prohibition that forbade Ahmadis from "posing as Muslims" was open to interpretation and application by overzealous and extremist mullahs and government officials alike. Ahmadis had to declare in their passports that they are Ahmadis. Fundamentally, Zia wanted to "stamp out the cancer of Ahmadiyyat."

Extremists realized that they had been given a carte blanche and began to attack Ahmadis with impunity. During this time, hundreds of Ahmadis were charged, arrested, and battered physically and emotionally. Against

this backdrop, the extremist mullahs were emboldened and started a series of attacks against Ahmadis, including acts against their mosques by erasing the Kalima–al-Tayabba or destroying them completely.

According to the leading human rights advocate Karen Parker, "General Zia singled out Ahmadis in an open and vicious hate campaign of persecution. He and members of his administration made numerous public speeches urging Pakistanis to seek out, expose, and even to kill Ahmadis."

Anyone who believed in another prophet after His Holiness Prophet Mohammed (SAW) were considered *kafirs* [infidels]. We believe that Ghulam Mirza Ahmad is the Messiah. Zia's mullahs were given the false power to kill anyone who believed in the contrary and would say that they did it in the name of His Holiness Prophet Mohammed (SAW).

Unfortunately, religious fanaticism and extreme nationalism has taken a bad toll in countries like Pakistan and in other parts of the world. Sadly, some people misinterpret their own faith with extreme views and resort to violence and discrimination. This disrupts the lives of the majority who are peace-loving individuals.

Despite the tumultuous past of Pakistani politics, I am happy with the current state of affairs in the country of my birthplace. The new government is making efforts to create a better Pakistan in which religious freedom, equality and fairness are recognized. I look forward to the day when, regardless of race, color or ethnicity, everyone is welcome to live or visit the beautiful country of Pakistan, including Ahmadis.

We, the Ahmadi Muslims, are all quite peace-loving people. Our motto is, "Love for all; hatred for none." I continue to love my place of birth, Pakistan.

Chapter 11

Big House in Houston, Texas

My business prospered in Wichita, Kansas, and we started thinking about the next stage of our lives. Our children were growing up, and we wanted to raise them in a larger city. Wichita was a small city, and we felt we should live in a place where we had more people from our Ahmadi community. A bigger city would mean more friends for Bushra and the children.

Bushra had the children's best interests in mind and felt that relocating would be beneficial for them in the long run.

It was 1985, and my oldest daughter, Sadia, was ten, Babar was nine and Maria had just turned three. Because of their young ages, they had not established deep roots in any one place. Like other immigrants, we looked for places where we could find more people of our own region.

I knew that quite a few Ahmadis were getting settled in Los Angeles, which was my first choice for a relocation. The community had plans to build a mosque there, and I felt this would be an ideal location for us. I owned producing oil wells in Bakersfield, California, and used to fly or drive often

from Los Angeles to Bakersfield to check on my oil wells and facilities there.

My second choice was Houston, the energy capital of the world. Here, I was enticed by banks that provided loans to oil and gas companies. I wanted to expand my operations and felt that availability of financing would help me grow my business. This quickly became my number one choice.

I decided to phase out my operations in Wichita, and we moved to Houston in December 1985.

I rented a home in Houston, and later an office building. I wanted to expand and buy more oil and gas wells production. After my unpleasant experience with private investors in Wichita, I relied only on banks to finance the purchasing of oil wells and operations. Houston was a good place to be, and I was excited.

After a few months, Bushra started adjusting to her new life in the Bayou City. She kept herself busy running after the children and looking after their needs. Her main job included dropping and picking them up from school and taking them to different afterschool activities. Once she got settled in this routine, Canada soon faded from her memory. Her love for America increased and she made new friends both in and out of the Ahmadiyya community in Houston.

Meanwhile, I continued to spend most of my time on travel and business.

Once we became familiar with Houston, I purchased a large home that we referred to as "the big house," located on over two acres of land. This big house became the ideal setting for the joint family system that Bushra wished and wanted.

We purchased the big house property in the early 90s and expanded it into a large compound in 2002.

The homes within the compound have a total of 25 bedrooms, 7 kitchens, 26 bathrooms, 12 living areas, five laundry rooms, one movie theater, seven garages with double doors, three studies/offices, seven fireplaces (some with two sides), nine dining rooms, a gym, a gazebo and a large heated saltwater pool. There is a large hall/room adorned with imported African wood, which we called the Jungle Zebra Room. The home has a vaulted ceiling ranging from 26 to 32 feet with reinforced steel. Each room has its own style of faux painting with distinct wallpaper separating each space.

There are marble floors in the hallways and bathrooms with wood floorings in the bedrooms. We have an 18th century Roman Catholic church door on the wall in the main dining room and three main tall entry doors made of steel and glass that are 18-feet tall. We also have assorted taxidermy located in certain parts of the home. The wildlife

consists of lions, cheetah, lynx, elk, deer, zebra, bear and other varieties, along with variety of wild birds. There is a plethora of oriental rugs throughout the house, along with different kinds of wild African and American birds. There are 367 large windows adorning the home. This large big house is all built on one floor with no steps throughout the property except a small area with a second floor.

The big home needed a taskmaster to make sure it was maintained and looked after, and Bushra became the one for this task. Bushra ran this house like she would with a joint family in a Pakistani village. She was still set in her Pakistani ways. She wanted her children to adapt to the ways of Pakistan on concepts of morality, decency, and culture, even after their marriages.

On days when I was away, the children would misbehave, just like others of their age. Bushra would always tell the kids, "Just you wait! When Papa comes home, I will tell him that you disobeyed me." This was typical in our culture where children are raised to fear even the shadow of their father.

But it's hard to fear someone who is gone much of the time. I became a ghostlike figure. Most often, I would not do anything, even after hearing Bushra's complaints. Yet, my two elder children (Sadia and Babar) remained fearful of me

based on Bushra's remarks. By the time my younger children were born, I feel that both Bushra and I were less strict. When my daughter Maria was born, I recall being a lot more relaxed as a parent, and when my son Yousuf was born, I was in a place in my life where work was a lot more settled. Maria was very close to me before Yousuf was born. Maria would stay around me and push me around. During her young age,, Maria was a tomboy.

Yousuf has always been very close to me and if you ask any of my family members they will tell you, Yousuf is the baby of our home. Ever since he was a small boy, he was very attached to me. A funny memory I never forget from Sadia's engagement party is of him holding onto my leg so tightly that his palm would start sweating but he would still refuse to let go. I had a soft spot for him, and I'll admit he got away with a lot more than my other children.

My oldest son, Babar, often got into trouble, as most boys do while they are growing up. Sometimes, he would return home late, and this drove Bushra crazy.

Bushra loves her children, but she was strict with them, and looking back, I know she did the best she could and raised our children in a devout and honorable way.

Bushra did not want our daughters wearing Western clothing. As soon as they returned from school, they had to dress up in a traditional shalwar kameez.

As they grew older, Bushra started getting more relaxed about this and even she started enjoying Western clothing as time passed in America.

On several occasions, I've asked Bushra why she used to wear a shalwar kameez after having lived in Canada and the United States for several years. Why did she have to dress differently?

"What is wrong with me following my Pakistani culture?" she would say.

Bushra tried to leave this in Pakistan, but it somehow stayed with her; however, I did notice Western changes to her as she grew into Houston. She hired an Arabic teacher, and even an Urdu teacher, so the children could get tutoring in the Quran. From a young age, she also instilled the importance of the family remaining together, encouraging them to stay with us even after they decided to marry. This was the reason we purchased the "big house" in Houston and had expanded it to accommodate all our children and their prospective families. There was certainly room for all, and then some.

The big house, all built on a single floor with no steps throughout the home, with its grand elegance, created a great

first impression. The big house is quite expensive to manage and operate. God gave me the resources to maintain it, and I thought I would enjoy living in a larger home. Bushra ran it with discipline, and the children lived with less independence. The big house became a place where Bushra ran the show.

As years passed, I really began to notice the cracks in the joint family system we had created. The children became reliant on us and enjoyed all the luxuries and benefits of a joint family but were lacking the work ethic and dedication that I considered important. Sometimes I thought, "Do I really need a house this big where everyone lives under one roof?"

I asked Bushra to oversee payment of all the household bills, which was probably a mistake on my part. She had good common sense in most matters but was carefree with regards to money. I wanted her to find independence, to take part, but this was not meant to be. After a few months, we started missing payments, and I was forced to give this task to my personal accountant. Bushra was now happy, as it freed her from an added responsibility.

Meanwhile, Houston gave me plenty of opportunities to grow my business. I started diversifying into buying oil and gas mineral lands; I also got into the oilfield services sector and real estate. I knew that I could not trust the volatile oil

markets and continued to purchase real estate as a hedge against the boom and bust of the oil industry.

Even when I first began, I forced myself to be disciplined, to work hard, and not to miss any deadlines to pay my lenders. Work became my greatest enjoyment and followed me everywhere, including my travels.

Being a "workaholic" has not impacted me in a negative way. I do not lose sleep because of work. However, if I had to finish something, I would never procrastinate and would get up in the middle of the night to get it done. As a habit, I do not sleep more than six to seven hours per night on average and I choose not to use any sleep medication. For most of my career, I have even worked half days on Saturdays. Since I stopped that practice around four years ago, I hardly see anyone in the office at work on Saturdays!

As my business prospered, we went on vacations as a joint family. Europe was a favored destination, and we would often visit Vancouver, Hawaii, and New York once every quarter. While I enjoyed learning more about new lands and their culture, Bushra liked only to shop and would only wander into shopping malls and stores. I often wished we could have shared more time cultivating common interests during these trips, as I love to visit and see other cultures' history, but it did not seem to be our fate.

We used to travel to Vancouver to meet relatives frequently, and on one such trip in the early 2000s, a close relative came and told me that he had just lost his main job and had started driving a local taxi. I felt bad for his situation, and he told me he was good at repairing and maintaining real estate properties. I really wanted to help him out, so over the next few months, I purchased a couple of properties in Vancouver and put him in charge of managing them. He worked hard, and in a short span of time, I launched a real estate company in Canada, which has done quite well for me.

A simple act of offering a helping hand with kindness to others rewarded me in kind, not just financially, but more importantly, in my heart. I often noticed that when I help someone without any personal motives, God has always blessed me with a lot more than whatever assistance I provided to others.

Chapter 12

Hurricane Harvey Devastation

On August 21, 2017, Hurricane Harvey rolled into Houston.

My eldest son, Babar, was alone in the house when water started pouring in, flooding the entire big house on its main first floor. I was in Vancouver as he was sharing photos of the water reaching over two feet, and I was deeply concerned. I asked him to immediately vacate the big house, but he could not.

We had two German Shepherd dogs, and he rescued them first and put them on the second floor of one of one of our guest homes. After making sure the dogs were safe, he was finally able to exit the house. He walked in high water and swam around two blocks where Sadia and her husband, Ijaz, finally rescued him and took him to their home.

A week later, I returned, and the main floor of our beautiful big house was all destroyed. This was a loss in millions.

I was deeply saddened and could not believe it. In just a few hours, a lifetime of precious memories had vanished.

We lost expensive furniture, desks and tables, videos, priceless family pictures, all our household goods, our entire library, oriental rugs, and other very valuable antiques. The custom paintings in all the rooms were totally destroyed and the losses ran into the millions with no insurance coverage available due to the rising water. In addition, most of the cars were flooded.

I reconciled and felt that these were just material things, and I should be lucky we were all still alive and safe.

It was harder for Bushra, who was intimately connected to every nook and cranny of the big house. This was the home we had been living in for over two decades as a closely knit, joint family, and the sight of the colossal devastation was heartbreaking, especially for her.

After this incident, my respect for the remarkable power of nature increased greatly. During another recent hurricane, a friend told me that one of her close friends was living in danger because of flooding in Florida. I offered her friend one of my homes in Houston and told her that she could stay there until she found alternate accommodations. I would not have considered doing that earlier. Now, I have a different type of respect for people affected by natural disasters. Your perspective changes when you have lived through something like this.

When our big house flooded, I felt it may have been a punishment from God. But then I reminded myself that God is a God of love. I realized that it was not just my family who was affected—it was hundreds of thousands of others as well. I asked myself, "Why did God punish little children, animals, and so many people who already had nothing?" The answer I received was that it was not a punishment; rather, it became a way to connect with others, and to bring about the best in one another.

The way in which Houston came together as a city was remarkable. The city, with the help of its residents, helped one another whole-heartedly and today, you cannot even tell such a disaster occurred only a few years prior.

I consider myself lucky in comparison to those who lost everything in the wake of Hurricane Harvey. While these disasters cause much pain and suffering, I hold on to the hope that these disasters will also help find ways in bringing out the good in the world and strengthen our bonds with each other as humans.

Chapter 13

Giving Back to the Ahmadiyya Community

As a child, I had always wanted to serve humanity. I wanted to help others, as I believed it was virtuous. Furthermore, by giving back, I wanted to show my reverence to God. My parents always told me that if one did something good for the house of God, this would help one find a place in heaven.

In Houston, there were few Ahmadi families in 1985. However, I wanted our Ahmadi members to meet occasionally, so when I arrived in Houston, I started renting the clubhouse in my subdivision, so we could meet on every Sunday afternoon.

What started off with two families, slowly increased to over ten, and soon, we had to find a larger space.

I helped locate and buy a property on Houston's north side to launch the first house of worship for Ahmadis in Houston. After a few years, I realized that this was an isolated area and the land was small.

One day, while driving on Interstate 45 and Rankin in Houston, I saw a board that said: "Land for sale." I

immediately called the broker, and within a few days, I had purchased ten acres of land.

I donated five acres of that land to the Ahmadi chapter in Houston to build a new mosque. A couple of years later, the local Ahmadi leaders of the Houston chapter came to me and said they did not have any funds to build a mosque. As a result, I told the *amir* [president] of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Washington in the United States that I would agree to build the new mosque in Houston. I also requested that I be given the liberty to build the mosque without a committee so that I could build a new mosque with my own vision and desires.

The Amir agreed to my proposal and our 4th Caliph, Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad personally came to Houston and laid the foundation stone for the Houston new mosque on June 30, 1998. The Mayor of Humble, Mayor of Tomball and representatives of the Mayor of Houston also attended the event. I was asked to suggest to the Caliph a new mosque name of my choice for the new Houston mosque. However, I felt that it would be best for our Caliph to bless the Houston mosque name from his own intuition. The Caliph gave the name *Baitul Samee* to the Houston new mosque. I funded, managed, and built the mosque and handed over the keys to the Houston Ahmadiyya chapter in March 2004. I built the

Houston Baitul Samee mosque to my own personal liking. I believe it is a beautiful mosque.

The mosque has one minaret 54.5 feet high and a dome 42.5 feet high. The inside diameter of the dome is 10 feet. This mosque is so grand that it has 72 windows and seven doors, and it can accommodate more than 800 people for prayers at any given time. The parking area can hold more than 250 cars in any weather condition.

During that time, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community Headquarters asked me to be president of the Houston chapter, but I politely and respectfully declined, as I felt that I was not the person for the job.

I have received several calls and letters of appreciation by the local Ahmadis from Houston and even other places after the new Houston mosque was completed. I would like to convey this message of my deepest appreciation with many thanks in humility to each and every member of the Houston Ahmadi Jamat for their assistance, good wishes, prayers and support as without that, the Houston Ahmadi Muslim Community's new mosque building project would not have been successful.

I am quite happy and satisfied knowing that in Houston we have a place of worship where everyone can come together to pray and enjoy. I am quite happy that the land I donated,

and then the Baitul Samee mosque I built have been a great place to gather for the local and greater Ahmadiyya community.

These days, around 300 to 400 people pray at this mosque, and it plays an important role in fulfilling the communal and spiritual needs of our community. It offers avenues for our members to attend Friday sermons, Sunday classes, classes for children, and activities for women. The large facility also helps the community host Eid and several other festivities onsite and has given a boost to the Houston Ahmadiyya community.

Interestingly, I also own an adjacent church building and the lands around it that I lease to a church. Who knows, God may give me dual blessings from the mosque and from the church.

Chapter 14

Unfiltered Mind: Parkinson's and Dementia

It was June 10, 2014, and my mind was filled with anxiety. I went from one thought to another, something very abnormal for me. At work, everything seemed eerie and unusual. I was distracted. I was anxiously waiting for an answer to something that was already delayed by 24 hours.

Around 10 a.m., my phone rang. Bushra's neurologist called and gave me the grim news that she was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, a disorder of the nervous system that affects a person's movement and memory.

A few days prior, Bushra had gone to Houston's Methodist Hospital for a brain scan. The neurologist had ordered a DaTscan where an imaging drug is injected into the bloodstream to help doctors assess dopamine transporters, a chemical involved in controlling movement. A special device, called a gamma camera, took pictures of Bushra's brain. The neurologist studied the DaTscan and found that the left side of her body had become stiff, a clear indication of Parkinson's disease.

"I did not want to give you this worrisome news yesterday. I wanted to wait a day," the doctor, who is a friend

of mine, said in a somber tone. Little did he realize that the last 24 hours were some of the longest, most anxious hours of my life.

How could this happen to Bushra? What was the cause? Is there a cure for this? Is God punishing her? For what? Why? What's next?

Bushra lived for her children and family. She lived with me, clung on to me and depended on me. For the last 25 years, I've heard her constantly say, "I want to die before you die. I pray I never have to live a day without you." I have always assured her that somebody will take care of her no matter what and everything will be fine. I am her comfort zone, the lone guiding star in her life where she will be protected, cared for, and nurtured. Yet, I had no idea what was ahead for us.

I had never researched Parkinson's before in my life—there was no need. Even when we began Bushra's tests. I never went online to understand what it was because I so badly wanted to believe the test would be all fine. There was no family history and there were no possible causes that I could think of.

Shortly after hearing the news, I drove home feeling defeated. I paced across the long hallway of our big house.

The home was designed without any steps, as I knew it would help us during our old age.

I cried as I knew this disease was incurable and that it eventually could destroy her memory and reduce her body movements. I realized this was the beginning of the end of her productive life.

She had been quite careful about her health and had lived a healthy lifestyle. I had a hard time understanding, or believing, that this was happening to her. I did not want to reveal anything to Bushra now, and for over 30 minutes, I sat silently. Any of my successes were just material, my ambitions, my wealth; they all paled in comparison to what I had just heard.

I decided to call each of my four children to break the news. In this moment, the house resembled a morgue. There was a cloud of darkness hanging over our heads, and the house was eerily silent as I waited for my children to come home.

Bushra knew something was wrong because the children rarely came home together before lunch. She could easily sense that I was deeply disturbed. I simply could not hide it.

"What happened? What did the doctor say?" she asked.

I told her that she had Parkinson's disease.

"What is Parkinson's disease?" she asked.

I told her what the disease was and said we needed to see the doctor so that she can start on a regimen of medications. She was already very anxious, so I did not want to give her this totally unsettling news in its entirety.

The children controlled their grief in front of her. I knew they would all grieve in their own way and in their own time. These were all kind, compassionate adults yet still children confronted with devastating news about their own mother.

We went to the neurologist a few days later. He prescribed levodopa, a drug used to control tremors, movement and shaking in people afflicted with Parkinson's disease.

"Let's start with a baby dose of this medicine and see how she reacts to it," her Doctor said.

"Is there a way we could stop the progression of this disease? I asked.

"I'm sorry. Unfortunately, I don't have a clear answer for you, as it impacts different people in different ways," the doctor said.

No single wonder drug could cure Parkinson's, but there were options we could try, and while devastated, we remained hopeful.

Over the next few months, I took her to four different PD (Parkinson's disease) specialist doctors in Houston, and a major world-renowned Parkinson's specialist in Toronto, Canada. They all came to the same conclusion: each case was different, and only time would tell. We were playing a waiting game. One neurologist described different experiences he had seen from his patients: some stopped walking just after three months of diagnosis, others lost their memories entirely, while others could not talk anymore. Some lived for decades with sharp memories except for some stiffness in their joints.

At home, I kept wondering if there was any way I could find out why and when this had happened to her.

It took me back over two decades ago when she used to complain of a burning sensation in her head. The odd burning sensation would move from one part of her head to another. We took her to multiple doctors, did at least three MRIs, and all of them said she was fine.

Around 15 years ago, Bushra had complained of frequent back pain and pain on her spine. I took her to different brain and bone doctors, but none could give us a clear explanation and looking back, I wonder if these were early indicators of Parkinson's.

Once, during our daily walk at the park close to our home, I noticed there was some stiffness on her left side.

When people walk normally, both the right and left hands typically sway in a rhythmic motion. For Bushra, her left hand remained stiff and there was some issue with the hand coordinating with other body movements.

I asked her, "Why aren't you moving your left hand? Is there something wrong?"

"No. I am absolutely fine," she said.

I still had doubts. One day, she tripped on a small boulder, fell and injured her foot. I took her to an orthopedic surgeon. She recovered from that episode, seemed fine and did some physical therapy for a few months.

But she was not absolutely fine at all.

It was a bright January morning in 2014, and the first shaft of sunlight slowly entered through our bedroom window. It was 7 am, and I crawled out of bed to see Bushra struggling. Her hands and feet were stiff, and she was crying in pain. It would take her another several minutes to just get up from bed. This is when the real problem started. That was when I decided I needed her to go to a neurologist again.

She was stubborn and despised visits to the doctor and medication. "My God is with me, and I don't want to take any medication," she would say. I could never convince her of the importance of seeing a therapist to cure her lifelong anxiety and feared that this would be more of the same.

Bushra always thought therapists were a senseless creation. She kept changing therapists and seldom revealed anything to them about her life. Therapists asked her questions, but she declined to respond. Once, I hired a woman therapist hoping that she would talk to her and find a cure for her anxiety, but she felt that most therapists were useless and crazy. I wish she had opened up to these people. I believe it may have helped her heal some of the trauma she carried from her childhood, and perhaps kept her from her current state of mind and body.

Bushra's memory has increasingly faded. Over the last four years, her memory has slowly been erased, much like we would erase notes from a blackboard as children, leaving only a hazy remnant behind. This memory loss appears to be irreversible and gradually becoming worse.

Today, I live with a second-grader trapped in the body of a 70-year-old woman. Bushra's childish mind brings back bad memories from her past. She used to throw tantrums a few months ago, but now she is mostly calm while complaining of her body pains. She gets angry, repeats sentences, gets irritated quickly and plays pranks, just as she might have done as a child.

My wife of 47 years is now only a shell of the woman I once knew.

She recognizes her children but does not remember all their names. "Your older son…what's his name?" she asked recently.

"Babar," I replied.

"Why didn't he call me today? Where is he?"

"Babar is in California," I said, information that she should have recalled without trouble. Her memory is somewhat there but not there, and it changes from day to day.

Bushra may recognize you if you are right in front of her; however, a few minutes later, you could easily fade from her memory. Her mind erases her memories like a windshield wiper erases rain droplets. I notice that her memory is more come-and-go.

She has four small pouches filled with pills to be eaten before breakfast, lunch, afternoon, and at bedtime. However, just five minutes after taking her medicine, she will come to me and say, "I did not take my medicine." I often tell her that she took it, but she sometimes becomes agitated, repeating that she has not.

I am fortunate to have the caregiver's services and other home staff at the house to look after all her daily needs. Bushra often states, "I don't need anyone to look after me." Yet I know this to be quite the contrary. She tells me

throughout the day, "I just want to see and spend time with my children."

Shopping is something she used to enjoy but not anymore. She loves shoe stores, and we recently went to one and she picked out a pair. They were the exact same ones she had bought a week ago. The salesgirl had to convince her that she had already purchased them. It is heartbreaking to have such ongoing experiences such as this, but I continue on as best as I can.

The medications have made Bushra unemotional. Before, she would cry over silly things and was often too empathetic and generous. If someone told her they were in financial hardship, especially a family member, she would come to me and ask me to give money to that person.

Today, she is not coherent. Every day is a struggle, and I can only hope and pray that it does not get worse. We checked clinical trials for Parkinson's disease, but she is not a candidate because of her poor spoken and written English, and it would also be difficult for her to tolerate long stays in a hospital. The medicines can control her tremors, her pain, and her anxiety, but not much can control the memory loss.

Parkinson's has affected my family deeply. My personal wish is to spend as much time as I can with Bushra in these days until the last fragment of her memory remains. I

ask and encourage my children to do the same, to sit with her and spend time with her.

"We do not have the mom we once had," the children say to me sadly. 'You are now our father and mother." Well, I am often concerned that I was not a good father, so how can I assume the world's toughest job of being a mother? I trust and do my best to try to perform both duties and hope that is good enough.

Earlier, Bushra would cry a lot, saying, "I know I've done something wrong. God is punishing me." I used to console her but with the medication, at least her emotional outbursts have calmed down.

I had thought of moving her back to Canada, so she could stay closer to all her siblings, but I decided against that as our children are all here in Houston.

Since her diagnosis, I spend a lot more time with her. I am quite lonely. I have been way less involved with my businesses and have left it more and more in the hands of my son Yousuf and my son-in-law Ijaz. The road ahead is filled with so many blind spots and as I drive carefully forward, I always take a moment to look fondly in the rear-view mirror.

There is a fading memory in front of me, a receding life that I need to look after.

Bushra has always been a naïve person, a very simple human being with an unpolluted mind. Sometimes, her simplicity bordered on ridiculousness, but it was something endearing about her character. Now, her simplicity can be attributed entirely to Parkinson's.

Did anxiety create this? Possibly, we will never truly know.

Her life was hard with many disappointments along the way. She did not see the opportunities she had to grow and to be productive; instead, she lived her life carrying around the traumas of her childhood, like a baby elephant tied to a weak post. Over the years, the elephant became bigger and heavier but never made any attempt to escape, until it just became too much for her nervous system to bear.

In her prime, Bushra was an iron lady who made a ceaseless effort to encourage her children to learn and adopt a traditional Pakistani heritage, as she had done. As her children grew and got married, she told them categorically to respect their husbands and to lead good lives.

And, she took special care of her sons-in-law whenever they came home. "Ijaz needs tea and biscuits." She would yell at Sadia, "Go get him what he wants."

Bushra's passion was giving. She was a great confidant and the best at keeping secrets as she disliked gossip

and was a great counselor to her friends who had personal issues.

Today, her unfiltered and childish mind cannot hold any more secrets. She doesn't have the choice of putting on a mask; her regression is ever present, for all to bear witness. It is truly heartbreaking to watch. I spend my waking hours with a fragmented mind, trying to comprehend what happened before and what is happening now.

Today, Bushra needs help, time, companionship and care more than ever. She needs someone from her family and her friends to provide her company, sit with her, talk to her, listen to her, joke with her, spend time around her in her lonely life. She is unable to express herself, but I can feel that she misses company, love and care from her close dear ones.

I see Bushra's mind like the crystals in a hand-made kaleidoscope: sometimes they come together and form beautiful, colorful designs, but most often, they are shredded and broken in mass, a chaotic disarray.

Her disease has made me reflect a lot on my own life. Despite the busy nature of my work, I should have been more involved in the lives of my children. I should not have been a strict, ghost-like figure for my first two kids while I took the initiative to be more a part of the lives of the other two. I should have done something more for Bushra to reduce the

extreme anxiety and the stresses of assimilating to a Western culture, and maybe, she would not have been a victim of Parkinson's disease.

I should have really pushed her harder to read and learn English.

I should have really pushed for her to go and see therapists.

I should have…

Hindsight is 20/20, or is it? I will never know the answers to many of my questions. Again, I must have faith and hope in the greater good that may come from this devastating situation.

Chapter 15

Lead with Optimism

This book is a collection of my experiences written with humility; my hope is that it will help you. You may have found some incidents useful and interesting, certain actions that you can adopt, change your own life and someone in your own family's life, some thoughtful and some maybe didn't relate to you at all. As you skimmed through the pages of this book, I hope you learned something, and I want to thank you for reading it.

Before we part, I want to tell you my hopes for my family's future.

The future is bright. I am proud to have come from a remote village with access only via dirt roads in Pakistan with a deprived basic education, to have encountered hardships and then to have gone on to build a successful oil and gas business in the West.

Bushra and I are leaving a solid future for our children. I am not referring to wealth, but rather, our values of hard work, consistency, and total devotion.

We have instilled many principles in our family and in many whom we have encountered along the way. I will share those here.

Be punctual, make good use of available opportunities and you will have an edge over others.

Take wins and losses in stride. Do not be elated by your successes, and do not get disappointed when you fail. They will come and go. Each failure gives you wisdom to prepare for the next success. Every time I failed, I felt there was something better coming for me, and I moved on to the next. You should condition your mind to face failure, because that's the only path that will take you to success. Be a helping hand with your own time to ill and old folks with a deeper inner conviction.

Be humble, be genuine, and never forget your roots.

Be steadfast in your beliefs and look to the future with optimism.

Remember to take calculated risks. Some will work, others may not, but keep consistently trying with a positive attitude.

Be a leader with humility and be an example to your employees, colleagues, and subordinates, as well as to your community. Always be a silent helping hand to others, help

others without seeking for any returns or rewards and take good care of people who have done well to you.

At the end of the day, any business is only as good as its leader. Sometimes, we may be tempted to take shortcuts and to look at things in the short-term, but I am telling you from my experience that patience, long-term thinking, and hard work will do you a lot of good. Quick successes yield temporary gains.

Always respect women; encourage them to work, to be a volunteer and to be independent. If you are a woman, you ought to know and understand that you are the root and the foundation of mankind. You have a unique gift bestowed upon you by the almighty God of patience, love, dedication, and compassion. These unique qualities generate positive energy from you throughout different phases of your life as a daughter, a wife, and a mother.

If you are an immigrant in America, make sure you learn English, learn to drive, and pursue a passion. Find a job or volunteer opportunity so your mind will be occupied, and so you will be able to contribute to society.

Always be kind and good to your parents, the elderly, the ill, and the less fortunate, and remember to take care of your health, no matter how hectic your life may be with your own undivided time.

Material wealth is transient. I have lost a lot of money, especially when oil and gas wells have blown out of control, when I lost legal battles, and when my big house was washed away by a huge storm. I persevered, thinking they were all only temporary, transient happenings. With a great foundation, I knew I could recover from any hardship through sheer hard work and a positive attitude.

I started writing this book shortly after Bushra was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 2014. I wanted to leave behind our story for all to read and enjoy. I was not going to let my memories slip away from me.

When I began writing, we were a family struggling to face the reality of a loved one having Parkinson's. In early 2014, when Bushra was diagnosed, the children were all leaving our big house and finding their own separate paths. There was anger and bitterness in each of us, and none of us knew how to face this new reality: the wife, mother, and matriarch of our family was now afflicted with an irreversible disease.

Today, as I complete this book, we are all living in Houston just a few minutes away from each other. Bushra and I now live in a home in Houston, and our children and grandchildren come to visit us often.

My grandchildren, especially Afreen and Iman, enjoy the pool. Bushra goes for her daily walks with the caregivers, me, and her children and sometimes, she sits in the pool area and watches the kids play. My current home is the hub for the family, and my children provide emotional support as we go through this phase of our lives with optimism.

Truly, this book started when I was just a young boy. I am 66 now, and while I am mentally experiencing some of the hardest times of my life, I feel healthy, content, and thankful.

It has not been easy to put Bushra and my successes, failures, joys, and the darkest points of my life on these pages. I do hope you will learn from them and gain new insights about how you and your loved ones can better your lives.

My son Yousuf and my son-in-law Ijaz are working with me, developing and expanding our businesses further. All my children have been a part of my business during some part of their lives. All my children have carved a bright future with their sheer hard work and dedication. They have grown up and lived with Western ideologies, though they respect our cultures, traditions and have been supporting, caring and loving in all the hardships of my life.

God bless Canada and America for giving me an opportunity to thrive.

By the grace of God, our big house is also now fully rebuilt and furnished. Even though Harvey washed away our old memories, we have been given the gift of making new ones.

Chapter 16

What Hard Work and Dedication Can Get You

In the early 2000s, I became interested in purchasing land that I could use for a ranch and other things. After searching, I purchased a ranch in Texas that coincidentally also had oil and gas wells on it that we own.

This ranch has wide-open landscapes of Texas.

We named this property the YC Ranch. In addition to the wells, the ranch has three houses, abundant wildlife including wild turkey, doves, quail, and deer. There is also a lake that is stocked with freshwater fish.

The YC Ranch is over 1,700 contiguous acres of land. After I purchased the ranch, I realized that a lot of my friends and family loved to go hunting. The ranch proved to be the perfect spot for hunting a different variety of wildlife. We designed the ranch for the hunters to enjoy. We have set up 14 deer stands, four bow blinds, and 18 feeders, which are constantly feeding year-round to make sure the wild game on the ranch are well fed and healthy.

A few years ago, we also started raising grass-fed cattle. The cattle have their own piece of the ranch to roam around and graze freely. We take pride in the fact that our

cows are not fed any sort of artificial feed, but rather are free grazing and grass-fed at the ranch.

I liked ranching so much that I bought more ranch properties in Kansas and in British Columbia, Canada.

Coming from such humble beginnings, sometimes my mind reminds me of memorable "firsts" in my life, like the first time I ever visited a ranch and dreamed of someday owning one.

But there are other "firsts" that as a young man, I never thought would happen:

- The first time I was able to go into a jewelry store and purchase a ring for Bushra without having to look at the price.
- Hosting my son, Yousuf's wedding in Hawaii at the Halekulani Hotel where, the main executive chef of Halekulani, personally catered over a week-long get-together. This was the same wedding where I took my entire family to Hawaii for over a week.
- The many vacations we took all around the world, staying in some of the world's most famous hotels without even considering the price.
- The first time I walked into a bank meeting knowing and feeling that I no longer needed the bank, but rather, they needed me.

- The feeling of accomplishment when I purchased five acres of land on a desired main street in Houston, donated it to Ahmadiyya Community and then built the Baitul Samee mosque. My intention was to build a house of worship for the Ahmadiyya Community to benefit from.
- The feeling of purchasing my first custom-made Patek Philippe watch.
- Being able to order a custom-made new Maybach when they were first being introduced into the country in the early 2000s. The attention that I got from driving the car made me uncomfortable, and I parked it in the garage after driving it for only 350 miles.
- Purchasing and owning other custom, unique cars like Porsche, Ferrari, Maserati, Lamborghini, and a Range Rover SV. I didn't drive all of them, of course, but I look at them as investments.

It's simply another testament to hard work and dedication. Anyone, no matter where they come from or their skin color or their background or what circumstances they may have overcome, can all be successful in the United States of America. God bless America!

Epilogue

The Best Things in Life Are Free

If there is one thing Bushra's diagnosis has taught me, it is that money cannot buy true happiness. I find happiness with deep and meaningful connections shared with loved ones. I place a great deal of importance on my family. Even though Bushra is not as coherent as she once was, she still deeply cherishes and enjoys the company of her children and grandchildren. Often in our home, our children and their families gather where we enjoy each other's company, conversation and a home-cooked meal together. Despite the fact that we have a large dining table that can easily seat us all, we all enjoy sitting at the breakfast table where the children and grandchildren drag extra chairs over so we can be closer; I look forward to these good times.

My eldest daughter Sadia is a truly kind and compassionate woman. From a very young age, she has always been concerned about making sure others around her were taken care of, and she carries the same wonderful traits with her to this day. Sadia's husband Ijaz is working with me in our business since they got married; he is quite a bright man and a joy to work with. Sadia and her husband Ijaz have raised

four amazing children. Rafia the eldest is currently in optometry school and well on her way to become an optometrist whereas Hania, the second oldest, is completing her undergraduate degree and plans to be an engineer. Both of Sadia's sons, Musa and Esa, have shown interest in one day working for our family business, God willing. I see in my grandchildren the respect and importance of their elders and being kind to everyone. I am a proud grandfather. I rejoice in the fact that my older grandchildren have grown into intelligent, hardworking young adults. I believe they can accomplish anything they set out to do.

My eldest son Babar currently lives in California so he can be closer to his daughter, Noor. Brishna, Babar's wife, is raising Noor to grow into a wonderful human being. My granddaughter Noor is a beautiful young girl. She is very intelligent and enjoys karate, lacrosse, and basketball. Babar has always been intelligent with a focus on software programming and has worked in many different businesses. He created software application for the oil and gas industry and recently for the mortgage industry.

My younger daughter Maria and I have always had a very unique bond. She has a fun and loving spirit, and she always has a youthful energy to her. Maria still acts and treats me as if I am a teenager. Maria's husband, Samar, is a very

kind young man. Maria and her husband Samar have two beautiful daughters, Afreen and Iman. They are truly the happiness of our family with their innocence and excitement for life. , and I look forward to the days when they visit and are excited to go swimming in our pool. At such a young age, I see the importance of values such as respecting their elders and being kind to everyone embedded in them. I am a proud grandfather, indeed.

My youngest son, Yousuf, has been working with me since his college days. I have seen him grow from the little boy who would not let go of my leg into a smart hardworking adult who still has his jolly and loving nature. Yousuf works with me in our business and he is a bright young man. Yousuf has developed a good habit of being able to mix in with others quite quickly and be able to make friends with anyone. Yousuf's wife, Ambreen, is a bright, God-loving, and intelligent, young woman. Ambreen's hospitality is remarkable; she loves cooking and serving others. He and Ambreen were recently married. I am happy that Bushra was able to see her beloved youngest son, Yousuf, get married and settle down while she still had her memory. It was a true happiness to her that she knew all her children were married and settled in their homes.

Along with my immediate family, I am blessed to have extended family all over North America.

My siblings all reside in America and though we meet whenever the chance presents itself, we always keep in touch. My brother Aziz lives in California and divides his time between various places for his work. Aziz's son lives in Houston and his daughter lives in Calgary. My sister Misha lives in Dallas, Texas. Misha's son and daughter live in Dallas and one daughter lives in Austin. My younger sister, Seema, lives in Santa Maria, California. Seema's three sons live in California. All three of my siblings and their children have all done very well for themselves and all their families.

Bushra's siblings, who I am close with, all live in Vancouver, Canada. They have been a great source of comfort and support during this trying time with Bushra's health issues, and I am thankful for their presence in my life. I also have several cousins living in New Jersey, and I love to meet them whenever I can. I am truly blessed with so many kind and caring relatives.

My immediate family and extended family have been a great support for myself. We often get together and spend time together. Those moments are the true blessings.

Reflections from My Friends and Family

My father Younas Chaudhary

By Sadia Rehman

My father may be known to many as an illustrious business owner, but to me, he is simply someone I enjoy sharing my life with. Granted, nearly all my early childhood memories are in some way colored by his work ethic and tenacity. He worked with a drive and passion that truly came from his heart. However, there were still moments where I could hear his laughter ringing out during one of his favorite television shows. The dedication he remained true to throughout his life opened doors for his children, and by extension, his grandchildren – the American Dream in its truest form. While my father's life has shifted in new directions, the constant in his life remains his zeal.

There is a softness that accompanies his more noticeable passion and success. It is demonstrated in his generosity of spirit and compassion. For what he has done for me, I will be forever grateful. The ripples of his kindness are felt by all of my family, helping them achieve things that would be impossible otherwise. More than that, he is someone we gather around. He is an anchor for our family that brings us together in love and laughter. Unfortunately, life has not

been easy on my father. With my mother's illness, I see him struggle with a range of difficulties, but he always maintains his hope. He has held on to that light, loving and caring for her with a selflessness that few could manage.

I pray that his legacy be remembered not only as a successful businessman, but also as the father and grandfather who created change. The man who, despite difficulties, elevated our family up into one of love and mutual respect.

My father Younas Chaudhary

By Babar Chaudhary

When anyone on the outside looks at my dad, they see a successful businessman, a philanthropist, a family man, and an overall good guy. That's not what I see. I see a man who stayed with his wife through it all. I see a man who lives by a code regardless of the monetary or emotional cost. Nothing taught me more than watching this life lesson. As a young Pakistani boy growing up in America, teaching me these principles made me the man I am today.

Like you, reading this story was an eye-opener. I had an idea about the many hardships my father went through, but to read about the details, made it real to me. To me personally, it made me realize why he made me write ten pages in the summer because my handwriting was hideous, or when he would tell me to run home while he drove next to me!

I am my father's son, and some of his own traits, whether I know it or not, have been passed down for the good. Some have benefited immensely in my life, like fortitude, drive, and principles. Some are a little strange—I stuff my pockets with napkins for no apparent reason, like the big man! I have had the luxury of watching a truly special human being's life unfold before me.

Our father always taught humility: I wanted Air Jordan's; I got Payless shoes. At the time, I was bummed, but now I look back and think what a valuable lesson he taught me. How easy is it to buy your kid what they want? I know — I have my own child and it's always easier to cut corners. Give them your phone. Let them play video games. Let them decide when they go to sleep. Not my father. He put in the time and effort to teach me these valuable life lessons. That's the hard work. That's what I know about my dad. He never took the easy way out. He never turned a blind eye for an easy out. He worked at EVERYTHING incessantly. He never gave up on me, he never stopped teaching me, and he truly is a person I consider one of my inspirations.

This book is in honor of my beautiful mother. I grew up in a house of women, and I've yet to meet a woman stronger than my mother. Through it all, my father's grace handling this crippling disease has made me rethink my own personal commitments. My father is always teaching.

My father Younas Chaudhary

By Maria Chaudhary

As I age and mature, I reflect a lot more on my childhood and how as a family of immigrants, we crossed the Pakistani culture with the American culture. The weave of both cultures knit together closely at some segments and at others the gaps were large, but the knots were all tied together to create the fabric of me.

I would say my parents did the best they could with what they had and what they knew. My father was always working, and we were always with our mother. The times I was with my father, I remember him being warm but not close enough to hold on to. He had a driving passion to succeed and make something out of nothing, and that was his passion. You can't help but respect his work ethic because he was like the Terminator, and his drive to get to the next milestone never wavered.

Looking back, I would say we all lived a life behind a chipped white picket fence and none of us were equipped to even notice the cracks. My mother was a very strong iron-willed disciplinarian who I believe had a background with trauma. The thing with trauma is it never goes away; it just keeps showing up uninvited, creating chaos.

In my young age, I was very close to my father. I was always a tomboy, and he always made me feel it was OK not to fit the mold my mother and culture had placed on me. As I grew older, my father encouraged and even indulged my passion and outlook for more in my life and not the typical path my mother, sister and many more women in my family had taken.

In most relationships, there are good times, bad times and even ugly times. We also had a time in our father/daughter relationship where the valleys were very low, and miscommunication gave way to resentment. This was a very uncomfortable time, and I am thankful it is in the past. I think it was bound to happen and sometimes, I am thankful we had that time to really break into a healthier relationship.

My father has made a lot of recent changes for the future of our family. Some of those decisions and choices were not easy and they were not what would have been, but he stood up alone. I appreciate all the changes my father has made, and I appreciate him. To some, he may be the oil businessman who made something out of nothing, but to me, he's a pretty cool dad who always has a shy smile and stands back to watch the show we call life. Hey, Pops, come join in on the fun!

Role Model, Father, and Husband

By Yousuf Chaudhary

My siblings have eloquently described my father's traits perfectly above, and I don't think I could describe him better. Incessant work ethic, fierce drive, unwaveringly loyalty, and curiously enigmatic. I want to touch on Younas Chaudhary's softer, more vulnerable side that I've had the pleasure and honor of seeing while growing up as his son. Let me tell you about my father and my role model, YC Senior.

When most people see my father, they see an intimidating businessman, but as they get to know him beyond the world's definition of a successful businessman, they notice he is an easy person to talk with who really cares about the people around him. One of my close cousins recently came to visit us in Houston and was able to spend some quality time with my father, and I think he nailed it on the head when he said, "I've gone my entire life trying to avoid Uncle Younas because he always seemed so busy and intimidating, but as I started talking to him, I realized that he is someone with a sense of humor and a kind heart who notices the smallest details that only someone who cares immensely would take notice of." When I asked about what he meant about noticing the smallest details, he explained that as we were all sitting

around at my father's house, all the younger cousins were talking about their Apple watches and all the things they loved about them, but my close cousin was left out of the conversation since he didn't have an Apple watch. Without anyone knowing or even noticing, my father quietly grabbed my cousin and took him to the Apple store down the road, bought him an Apple watch, and discreetly informed him not to mention it to anyone. Little details like this is what people don't see in my father, but he will notice things that most people would miss, because he truly cares about others. When I asked my cousin what he thinks about my father now, he simply said, "I can't believe I grew up around him, and it took me so long to get to know who he really is."

One thing that stands out more than others is my father's unwavering care for my mother while her health has deteriorated. Not a day has gone by where my father is not there for my mother while her physical and mental health has deteriorated. While all of my siblings, myself included, try to be there for my mother, my father is there for her day in and day out. Even during his golden years of his life he has made it his goal to give my mother a quality of life, while sacrificing some of his own quality of life.

I've been blessed beyond belief to grow up around someone who shows me the value of what it is like to be a

strong businessman. He has also shown me the value of what it means to be a gentleman and an empathetic leader. As I grew up working with my father, something that I noticed was how he treated everyone he worked with. Don't get me wrong, he was a businessman and he expected the best out of everyone who worked with him, but he would never let anyone feel like they were beneath him. I noticed his generosity extend all the way from his executives to the cleaning crew, and this is something that still sticks with me. I've made many mistakes, but my father has always been there to firmly guide me while making sure I don't make the same mistake twice.

My father continuously pushed me to understand the value of a dollar, and even after all his success, he remains true to his ties of not being wasteful with his money. To this day, he goes to his same barber who charges him $10, and he fills up gas in the suburbs because the gas prices are cheaper over there. At first glance, most people will see this as frugal and a bit unnecessary, but that's the wonderful paradox of my dad. On one hand, he will barely spend any money on himself and watches every dollar, but on the other hand, he will lavishly spend on others. The one thing that all my siblings will unanimously agree on about my father is that we have never been in want for anything; if we ever need anything, and

I mean *anything*, our father will always be there to not only help us but spoil us. Frankly, even when we push him to spend money on himself, he simply responds with a smile, saying, "Giving is better than receiving."

I am blessed beyond belief to call Younas Chaudhary my mentor, role model, best friend, and father. In everything I do, I strive to be like him and will continue to do so, and I hope that I can fill the big shoes of Younas Chaudhary as I grow into the man that my mother and father have hoped I become. If I can be a quarter of who Younas Chaudhary is and of all that he embodies, I'll know I've done something right.

A Funny Guy

By Misha (Younas's elder sister)

Younas has always been a very funny, social, and nice brother. He is two years younger than me, and growing up, I remember thinking he was a bit stubborn at times. Our father used to ask him to go for tutoring, and he would sometimes wander off to see movies!

He used to give our father a hard time as he was not too much into schoolwork. Our parents treated us all equally even though we came from a very conservative family. They were very liberal in their outlook towards gender equality with us. My brothers were very protective of us as no other guy could cast an eye on us.

Younas was a bit of a slacker at school and used to play with the pigeons at home. He got married at an early age, and he was very determined and ambitious. We came from a middle-class family and Younas always believed in working very hard and in establishing his businesses.

Later in life, when they had children, Younas and Bushra tried to raise them in a joint family system; however, we raised our kids so that they could leave us, and it was more a nuclear family concept. We've realized that the joint family is better for kids in India or Pakistan, but here, they will

eventually get fed up and leave. The jailing of our father and his treatment as a "hardened criminal" by the Pakistani government because of his faith has impacted our lives a lot.

Younas has devoted his entire life to Bushra, and I have never seen a husband do so much for his wife. I wish all men were like that! Younas never does anything for himself, and I've always felt bad about that. We know that it's hard to find a solution for Bushra's disease, and so Younas should try and do something for himself.

Reflections on my brother, Younas

By Aziz Chaudhary

Growing up, Younas and I were not that close.

I was in boarding school in Sargodha for around 10 to 15 years, and I had left home when he was just four or five years old. By the time I returned, we had lost touch about our childhood, and he was in the village in Sahiwal.

We connected for a while in 1963, when I was around 16, but that was only for a short time. That was when my father decided to move from the village to the city and Younas was going to school at that time.

I remember him being stubborn as kid and I also remember my father walking him to the village school. On the other hand, I had studied in one of the most prestigious schools owned by the Pakistani Air Force, and at age 15, I had started flying a glider.

Younas and I had so much contrast in our upbringing. I think we grew up with different mindsets and that was perhaps the reason why we did not connect.

Being the elder one, we also had a competition for girlfriends, and I believe there was a little jealousy there! Younas and I were very introverted growing up and I believe that was because of our upbringing as we did not have any training at home to be extroverts. He was stubborn but focused

and would go for it as he believed he could accomplish anything. We never had a fight and hung out with different groups of friends.

Growing up, our father did not provide the same educational opportunities for us. He really wanted me to go to Sargodha and get a better education while he had to go to public schools. There definitely was a disparity there and once we came to the Village and later to Farid Town, his opportunities were limited. However, considering the culture we grew up, the elder son or the first-born received much special treatment.

I don't remember his first day in Edmonton, but I know he was pretty quick, savvy and enterprising and found a job fast. I had a good job at Schlumberger but Younas had to find a way to live on his own and he had multiple, interesting jobs. He used to sell cars on the side and this I believe provided him a good base.

One of the best and interesting things he did was sell pots and pans for around $600 at the time. I still wonder how the hell he could do it by knocking on doors and making cold calls. He was very shy initially, but he soon got out of his comfort zone and developed his instincts in business. Younas was always very clearly focused in what he did, and he was able to go to Kansas and sell land leases to farmers that we

later resold to Canadian investors.

He has done well and sometimes, we bid for the same production rights. Overall, it's been a very healthy relationship. Our efforts in acquiring production rights from Sun Oil Corporation set up the foundation for his oil and gas business. I do remember the "blue book," the inventory of productions up for sale, as helping him get established.

Younas is a very smart businessman, and he has a great sense of morality and ethics in doing business, which is critically important. Besides, if he wanted something, he would go and do it. I believe if we had joined forces, we could have established a much bigger enterprise, but I am happy the way things are. I still think that some of his advice would have been very valuable to me had I adhered to it especially while making certain deals.

Our shared legacy began with very humble beginnings, even though we went in different directions. We have always upheld principles of morality and ethics and I'd just keep it that way. We both have faith in our Ahmadi Muslim religion, and I am still engaged in the oil and gas sector with work in Indonesia and Canada now.

Reflections of my brother, Younas

By Seema Saifi (Younas's youngest sister)

As the youngest in the family, I used to play alone a lot. Younas was very nice, and most times, he was better than Aziz, as he used to get mad at me once in a while.

Younas took great care of me. I remember once I fractured my ankle and he lifted me and carried me around to my uncle's house next door.

I don't have any bad memories of our childhood. But as we grew older, my father's imprisonment in 1984 was a big jolt to the family. A day prior to the event, I had planned to come back home during the school break with my children. We arrived in Pakistan a day before he got arrested. I was very shocked and extremely frightened.

A few months later, my grandmother passed away. Thankfully, my dad had arranged for everything including her burial, but the brutal regime did not even allow him to attend his mother's burial.

During those days, it was so sad, especially to see my dad shackled with chains across his feet while in jail. These are memories I can never forget, and both my brothers were there trying tirelessly to get him released. He did not do anything and was arrested just because he was an Ahmadi

Muslim.

Younas was very jolly and friendly and used to sing songs when he was younger. His closest friend growing up was the late Khalid Subaie and they used to play around a lot. I found later in life that he had a crush on one of my best friends. I was so young and naïve—Younas would send me off to buy candies just that they could be alone!

I recently saw him and what has impacted Bushra has been so devastating. Bushra was extremely nice and I can't fathom her current state. She lived with us for a long time in Pakistan, and, being the youngest one, I was so dependent on her. Younas has become more serious and he is not who he was before.

I know he is trying his best to be normal and I hope he realizes that her health is something that we cannot fix at this stage.

He (Younas) can predict the future

By John Gilbert (24-year employee)

Mr. Gilbert has bachelor's and master's degrees in business administration from Oklahoma University. He has extensive experience in the onshore oil and gas operations. He worked in senior positions for twenty-four years with Chevron USA, Inc. with decades of experience in all phases of the oil and gas business. John joined Younas Chaudhary Companies after taking early retirement from Chevron in the early 1990s.

I have known Younas for over 25 years.

The last two decades have been very nice and exciting for me on a professional level. Younas is a very intelligent person to work for, has great foresight and can see things far into the future before they happen. He has a fantastic memory and he knows all the operations in the field.

It's amazing how he knows and understands things out in the field about what geologists do and how they work, the intricacies of accounting. I see him look at sheets and say that certain projections are all wrong, and he is very good at balancing out numbers. He can take a look and know exactly what is wrong; he is a good number-cruncher.

Over the last two decades, Pioneer has diversified and moved into real estate. I think this was a very good strategy. Everything has its own cycles, and when one thing cycles down, the other could go up.

Younas has three major traits in him as a businessman. He is very intelligent, has great knowledge of the oil and gas industry and has foresight in predicting the future.

As a wildcatter and landman, Younas has learned the ins and outs of the oil and gas business. He understands how to do titles and leasing which is as important as geology and engineering.

Younas is fairly conservative in terms of risk taking. He has the ability to see well into the future and even though sometimes when people think that his decision is wrong at a certain time, they will realize in the end that what he said was right.

He works very well with people and they really respect him. He has been good to his employees and takes care of them.

Younas's foresight and intelligence have prevented bankruptcies over the last 40 years.

If he sees a problem financially, he knows how to handle it and so he is able to work things and keep things

going smoothly. He also knows how to walk away from deals before things go bad.

He also has a solid work ethic. If he needs to stay at work and get something done, he will stay and get things done. He also expects his people to have the same work ethic.

I know Younas pretty well, and I have a lot of admiration for him. I have worked with educated people, engineers and some in pretty good positions within major oil companies. I put Younas on a level above the president of Gulf Oil Operations, an individual I had worked with as he worked his way up and did not have to learn everything.

Younas takes care of his people and they take care of him, and it has been a very familial atmosphere.

A Kind, Caring Man

By Sharon (11-Year Employee)

One of the best things I can say about Younas is the fact that if he was not a great person to work for, I wouldn't have stayed here for 11 years.

I started out here covering the front desk. I eventually moved into Payroll and HR. Up until the past year when the company moved closer to downtown Houston, my commute was at least an hour each way. But because I knew I was working for Younas, I was actually excited about getting to work. That's the kind of boss he is. Of course, now I have a shorter commute, but I still have the same level of excitement working here.

It is such a nice feeling to come to work for someone who values his employees and appreciates their contributions. He is kind, generous, and most of all, down-to-earth. In most big companies, you never see the CEO, let alone talk to them. But Younas is different in that he respects all of his employees from the bottom to the top. He's very loyal to them, and that's probably why we have very little turnover here.

It's especially nice during the holidays. Every day from the start of the holiday season until the New Year, Younas brings food in every day for his employees. It's something different every day. You don't see that in many

companies.

In addition to that, he is a good listener. If you're talking about a vacation you took, or telling a story about something your kids did, he's truly interested in the details. Again, where else could you work and have the CEO actually be interested in hearing about your kids?

Perhaps it's because of his humble background and the fact that he is self-made that makes him so attuned to his employees and such a great man to work for.

He (Younas) helps women to succeed

By Cynthia (12-Year Employee)

When I came to work for Younas over 12 years ago, I did not know what to expect. I was starting out there as a receptionist and being on the low end of the totem pole, sometimes you can be overlooked. I certainly did not expect to be treated like a daughter to the CEO, but that's what happened, and it continues to this day.

Younas is more than a boss. He's a man who pulled himself up from his bootstraps to become extremely successful. And you would expect someone that successful to be unapproachable and even a little cocky. Not so with Younas. He is respectful and available to each and every employee. He knows what it is like to work your way up from the bottom, and he gives everyone from top to bottom a chance to feel appreciated and needed. He really does treat me like a daughter.

Of course, he is a very hard worker and expects that from his employees as well, but he rewards hard work.

In this day and age, it's also not easy to find a boss who not only wants women to succeed, but actually provides the work environment to make it happen. It's rare, and very much appreciated.

I think the best lesson I've learned from Younas is

that if something bad happens, or you are just having a bad day, his words of wisdom are always, "just put it out of your mind and start fresh tomorrow. Your blood pressure will thank you."

Working for someone who cares so much about his employees and treats them with so much respect is indeed a pleasure and makes coming to work every day a very pleasant experience.

YBC Foundation

(Younas and Bushra Chaudhary Foundation)

June 10, 2014 was a dark day in my life. I learned that my wife, Bushra, was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. I reflected deeply on the meaning of my life and translated my thoughts into this book. Since I have been personally affected so deeply, I have decided that 100% of the proceeds from this book will go to the YBC Foundation to help the elderly and ill to live independent lives without giving up their dignity or quality of life.

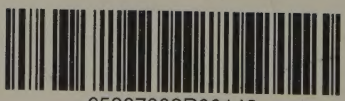
I am thankful for all the resources that I've had to take care of Bushra, but there are so many people in Houston that have nowhere to go and cannot attain a good quality of life when struck with a debilitating disease like Parkinson's or Alzheimer's.

Established in 2004, the YBC Foundation (Younas & Bushra Chaudhary Foundation) believes that every human being must be treated with dignity, respect, care, and love. All of the proceeds raised from the sale of this book will go to help the less fortunate and elderly in our greater Houston community and to other communities.

The YBC Foundation is solely funded by Younas Chaudhary and it is our hope that those who purchase this book and read my story will be inspired to make a donation to the YBC Foundation to further its charitable purpose. The YBC Foundation is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization (Federal EIN: 20-0479199) and donations are tax deductible to the maximum extent allowed by law.

To learn more about the YBC Foundation, please go to: http://ybcfoundation.com.

For any further questions on donations, the book, or anything related to the YBC foundation, please email: info@ybcfoundation.com.



Made in the USA
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15 July 2019

From Dirt Roads to Black Gold is an inspiring true story of self-made entrepreneur, Younas Chaudhary. Raised in a remote village in Pakistan, Younas built several successful businesses in the USA and Canada using a mix of common sense, hard work, consistency and determination. Younas had only $30 in his pocket when he first landed in Edmonton in 1973. He did backbreaking hard work, encountered frequent challenges and religious persecution. Later in life, tragedy struck when his wife was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. Despite the odds, Younas established himself as a visionary businessman with foresight in a highly volatile oil & gas industry.

This book is for anyone who has ever doubted themselves or their abilities. The message is simple: perseverance, consistency and self-belief can pave your way to success. His secret to success is simple: work hard, be positive, be consistent, and never give up.

"From Dirt Roads to Black Gold" shows us how one man took on the world with just a few dollars, a dream, and never looked back. The proceeds from the sale of this book will benefit the YBC Foundation, a nonprofit charity.

Learn more at : http://ybcfoundation.com.

YBC Foundation email address is info@ybcfoundation.com.

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